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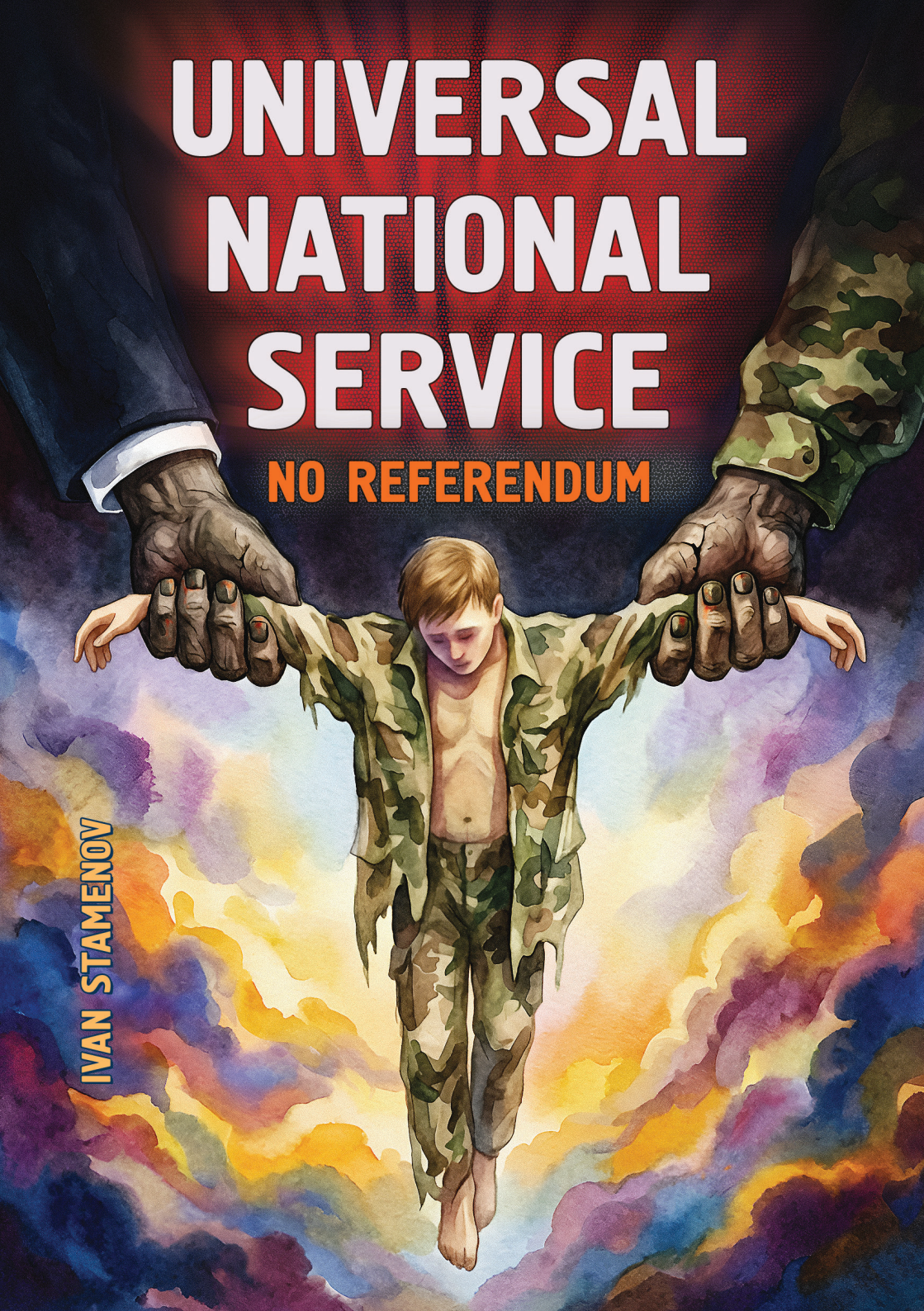

IVAN STAMENOV

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Foreword

My first book on this subject was titled *Referendum: Conscription*. At the time, the issue was still framed as a matter for public decision. As if the public would ever be truly consulted. As if a real debate would ever be allowed. As if there would be any real choice at all – let alone a referendum.

Today, that illusion is collapsing.

The same phenomenon now has a new name: "universal national service". No referendum – no one even mentions it anymore. Not for lack of time, but for lack of any intention to hold one.

Decisions are no longer discussed. They are announced – and we are expected either to nod in approval or to shrug in resignation. We encounter them in different guises, in different countries, at different speeds, but with the same underlying logic: the individual is once again treated as a resource over which the state claims ownership.

Nothing that has unfolded since the first book has shaken my position. On the contrary – it needs to be expanded and updated.

The term "universal national service" – or simply "national service", whether military, civilian, or some hybrid of the two – has been popularised by public figures such as former UK prime minister Rishi Sunak[1] and technology executives such as Alex Karp (Palantir Technologies).[2] It is already in circulation and steadily gaining traction. The rest is a matter of time – and local branding.

In **Germany**, this is no longer mere rhetoric. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius first launched a model of "new" military service, presented

[1] "Rishi Sunak Promises to Bring Back National Service for 18-Year-Olds", *The Guardian*, 25 May 2024.

[2] "US Draft Update: Palantir Urges Universal National Service", *Newsweek*, 19 April 2026.

as voluntary, but with a mechanism for moving towards compulsion if there are not enough recruits. Then, under Chancellor Friedrich Merz, this model was turned into law. The official assurance is that service remains voluntary "as far as possible".[3]

In **Denmark**, the direction is even clearer: Mette Frederiksen's government expanded the conscription system to include women, while the length of service was increased from four to eleven months. The measure was presented as "gender equality". Thus an ideologised language proves useful for expanding the state's claim over the human body: instead of compulsion being abolished for men, it is extended to women as well.[4]

In **Latvia**, President Edgars Rinkēvičs defended the return of compulsory service by invoking the Russian threat. There, conscription was restored after a parliamentary decision in 2023, and from the beginning of 2024, fit men between the ages of 18 and 27 have been subject to eleven months of service, after which they remain in the reserve.[5]

In **Lithuania**, Chief of Defence Raimundas Vaikšnoras speaks of universal national service as a strong political signal to NATO allies. He nevertheless adds the qualification that such a model should be introduced gradually, after the necessary infrastructure, instructors, and training grounds have been prepared.[6]

In **Poland**, the issue is moving along the same line, although in more cautious official language. Chief of the General Staff Gen. Wiesław Kukuła openly stated that the country needs a universal model of national service. After public reactions, clarifications followed that this

[3] "Military service modernised", Federal Government of Germany, 5 December 2025; "German parliament backs controversial military service law amid Russian threat", *Reuters*, 5 December 2025.

[4] "Denmark plans to expand military draft to women for the first time and extend service terms", *Associated Press*, 13 March 2024; "Denmark expands military service to include women", *Reuters*, 1 July 2025.

[5] "Latvian President Says Conscription Needed In Face Of Potential Russia Threat", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 15 January 2024.

[6] "'Universal conscription would be strong message to allies' – Lithuania's new defence chief", *LRT/BNS*, 2 August 2024.

did not necessarily mean a return to the classical conscription system. The retreat itself is telling: the authorities sense how sensitive the word "conscription" is, but they do not abandon the logic behind it. At the same time, Poland is expanding the scope of so-called military qualification – appearance before commissions that determine fitness, category, and status in relation to military service. In 2026, around 235,000 people are to be summoned, including the main cohort of 19-year-old men, older groups of men without settled status, people with temporary unfitness, and women with qualifications considered useful to the army.[7]

In **France**, Emmanuel Macron has also opened the door to national service: ten-month military training for young people is being introduced, due to begin in 2026 and gradually reach tens of thousands of participants. Officially it is voluntary, but within the same framework the possibility was left open that, in the event of a major crisis or war, parliament could impose compulsory service on certain groups of the population.[8]

The **Swedish** model is increasingly being pointed to as an example that could serve the whole of Europe: the state screens large annual cohorts and takes those it considers the most motivated and suitable. This form is particularly convenient for political rhetoric: it does not look like mass compulsory military service, but it preserves the basic principle – the state claims the right to classify, select, and use people according to its needs.[9]

Georgia lies on the periphery of the European security system. There, the new defence code centralises conscription under the Ministry of Defence and tightens the mechanisms through which the state reaches

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[7] "Poland's military chief of staff calls for mandatory conscription", Brussels Signal, 7 October 2024; "Polish Chief of Defence Warns of War. MoD: There Will Not be a Dismissal", *Defence24*, 9 October 2024; Dominik Moliński, "Wojsko wezwie 235 tys. osób do kwalifikacji wojskowej. Znamy plany MON", *Next.Gazeta.pl*, 14 July 2025.

[8] "French president unveils new military program for volunteers aged 18 and 19", *Associated Press*, 27 November 2025; "France to introduce voluntary military service amid threat from Russia", *The Guardian*, 27 November 2025.

[9] "Sweden's Military Conscription System Is a Model for NATO", Foreign Policy, 15 March 2024; "Europe eyes Sweden's conscription model amid military shortages", *Türkiye Today / POLITICO*, 17 July 2024.

young men. The system no longer relies only on the classical personal delivery of a summons: a call-up notice may be considered served through publication on the website of the responsible authority, while proposed changes also provide for notification by SMS or email. For citizens temporarily living abroad, this means that leaving the country no longer places them outside the reach of the conscription machine: after receiving a summons, they must return to Georgia within a "reasonable time" and appear before a commission. At the same time, some of the possibilities for deferment have been restricted, including those related to distance learning and certain forms of alternative service. Thus the reform does not merely "modernise" the army, but makes the person subject to conscription easier to find, harder to defer, and more directly subordinate to the state.[10]

The modernisation of Georgia's conscription system over the past ten years has not consisted only in tightened digital control, which makes it harder for citizens to miss a summons or otherwise forget about their "duty" and the procedures attached to it. Procedural progress now includes a number of conveniences provided following a recommendation by the country's ombudsman: disposable foot coverings, so that young men no longer have to walk barefoot from the changing room to the medical examination rooms; and, at the conscript's explicit request, a screen behind which he may remain alone with the doctor for the most delicate examinations. The ombudsman's own report, however, notes that the conscript's privacy is still not fully protected.[11]

Each country gives its "modernisation" of conscription a different name and dresses it up in local labels: "voluntary military service", "ser-

[10] "Parliament Adopts Defense Code", Civil Georgia, 21 September 2023; "Georgia amends military conscription rules: key points", *JAMnews*, 6 April 2026; "Conscript call-up notices to be served by official summons and text message under proposed changes to Defence Code", *Georgian Public Broadcaster / 1TV*, 6 April 2026; "Parliament Adopted Amendments to the Defence Code in the I Reading", *Parliament of Georgia*, 14 April 2026; "Georgia closes loopholes to defer military service", *OC Media*, 1 December 2023.

[11] "Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2016", Public Defender of Georgia, 2017.

vice according to need", "equality in the conscription system", "military qualification", "national readiness". But the overall direction is clear: Danish selection by lottery; French voluntary service with the door left open for compulsion in a crisis; a German model of voluntariness with a built-in compulsory reserve mechanism; the full return of conscription in Croatia and the Baltic states; Polish commissions that now cover not only the classical cohort, but broader groups of citizens as well. The forms differ; the principle remains the same. The state is once again beginning to speak of the human being as a resource that can be registered, assessed, categorised, counted, and eventually used.

The justification is familiar: war, threat, security, geopolitics, personnel shortages... Today, the justification is one thing; tomorrow, it will be another. We are being placed in a *forever war*[12] against an ever-shifting enemy. In short, the "exception" becomes the norm – and that norm is this: conform, or be forced to submit.

When I wrote the first book, there was already a real example – Ukraine. Conscription had been reinstated in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, and noncompliance was widespread. In Transcarpathia, more than half of those called up refused to serve; in some districts, the figure reached 70 per cent.[13] Repression was limited – at least compared to what came after.

The landscape has changed since Russia's full-scale invasion began. Along the Ukrainian–Hungarian and Ukrainian–Romanian borders, the freezing river – together with the gunfire of the border guards posted along it – has become a line of death for men who refuse to be conscripted into a war they do not consent to fight. Men are hunted down in the streets. They are beaten, restrained, and forced into vans by military units and police.[14]

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[12] CJ Hopkins, "The War on Whatever", *Consent Factory*, 26 March 2025.

[13] "Осенний призыв в Закарпатье на грани срыва" ["Autumn Conscription in Transcarpathia on the Verge of Collapse"], *ZN.UA*, 4 October 2018.

[14] Michael O'Flaherty, "Memorandum on Human Rights Elements for Peace in Ukraine", *Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights*, 8 July 2025; Christopher Miller, "A Violent Death Casts a Stark Spotlight on Ukraine's Military Manpower Problem", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 31 October 2025.

These will be called exceptions – even as one of the sources cited above describes them as "systematic and widespread", and even as Telegram channels are filled with distressing footage of men being forcibly mobilised. But such "exceptions" are the logical end of a dark premise – that someone has the right to dispose of another person's life as though it were property to be seized and put to use. The logic is this: if a person refuses to surrender their body and life to the state, the state claims the right to seize them by force – and, if necessary, to kill them.

At the same time, even in "united" Europe, the return of compulsory service is being openly discussed, often renamed precisely as "national service" or "universal national service", because these terms sound better and carry less historical baggage than "conscription" (military draft, compulsory military service). As we shall see when we examine specific European Commission plans, the old term has not been entirely abandoned, whether the subject is "best practices" in peacetime or defence in wartime.[15] Economies are being rearranged around the expectation of war. The war drums no longer sound in the distance; with each passing day, they beat louder.

No conspiracy theories are needed to see where this is heading. It is enough to look at what is being said, at the political decisions being made, and at the speed with which they are being "normalised". The following chapters will examine that process step by step.

* * *

This book is neither a direct continuation of the first nor written in the same style. There will be no biographical digressions. There will be no attempt to explain everything to everyone. There will be no dismantling of clichés already addressed in *Referendum: Conscription*.

Here, the arguments will be few. For that very reason, they will be harder to dismiss.

In the first book, it was necessary to respond simultaneously to many

[15] See, for example, "Safer Together: A Path towards a Fully Prepared Union" (Niinistö report), European Commission, 2024.

different objections – to the neighbour, the police officer, the teacher, the social media patriots, those who resent younger generations for being spared the hardships they endured in the name of "duty and honour". There, it made sense to dismantle the banalities that ordinary people recite almost as a matter of habit – phrases repeated to them since childhood.

This time, the target is different. We will not concern ourselves with the noise of the street, but with the justifications produced at a higher level – by politicians, institutions, media voices, experts, establishment intellectuals, and influencers aligned with those in power. They are the ones who shape the language that then trickles down to the rest of us. They are the ones who manufacture the false "public consensus" later presented as though it already existed and was beyond dispute.

The shift in approach is simple: from many arguments developed at length to a few core ones that leave no room for evasion.

* * *

This book is not for everyone.

It is not for those who prefer comfortable answers. It is not for those expecting an impartial discussion of the return of national service – primarily military, but also civilian, or any other form presented as compulsory "service to the state". It is not for those who believe this subject allows for a "balanced position" comfortably situated in the middle.

This book is for those who sense that something is fundamentally wrong with involuntary service – and want clarity, not a condescending pat on the shoulder. For those searching for the words to give shape to thoughts they have not yet been able to articulate. For those who want to know they are not alone when the time comes to defend, with a firm "no", their autonomy and bodily integrity – despite threats, sanctions, and repression.

This book is for them. And for them, every effort will be worth it.

* * *

I will not claim impartiality. On the contrary.

There are subjects on which impartiality is mere posturing. There are subjects on which standing in the middle amounts to passive participation on one side – the side already applying pressure. The issue of involuntary service of any kind, including compulsory military commitments and possible deployment at a later stage, is precisely such a subject.

This is not a subject on which one can remain comfortably detached, as though one were neither personally implicated nor morally concerned. If someone reads this as bias, that is their problem. I state my position openly. Those who claim neutrality have already taken a position. They just have not admitted it – perhaps even to themselves.

* * *

The central argument of this book is simple. It comes down to a single sentence, which needs no elaboration here:

Any state-imposed form of involuntary service lacks an ethical basis and violates inherent, fundamental, inalienable rights.

Everything that follows will show the many ways in which this simple truth is replaced, concealed, distorted, or circumvented – through rhetoric, fear, procedures, appeals to "the common good", moral pressure, and legal constructs. But whatever form it takes, the essence remains the same: a claim of power over the individual as over a resource or property.

This book does not seek agreement. It draws a line.

I have nothing against military or civilian service when it is freely chosen, nor against those who choose such a path. What I oppose is making either form of service compulsory.

I firmly believe that people contribute most to the society they live in – and to humanity as a whole – when they act out of conviction and

love. Any attempt to impose involuntary service violates personal boundaries, inalienable rights, and fundamental freedoms.

My hope is that it will encourage others, if and when the time comes, to draw the same line and find the courage to defend it – out of conviction.

* * *

Introduction

The issue of "national service" is moving beyond theoretical debate. In several countries, decisions to reinstate or expand conscription are being made and enforced without direct consent from those who will be forced to bear it.

Conscription registers are being compiled. The machinery of enforcement is being put in place. Procedures that once required human involvement are being automated. Across Europe, this does not take a single form. In some countries, conscription returns openly. In others, the process begins with registers, questionnaires, medical screening, deferment rules, budgetary shifts, or a language of "readiness" that prepares the ground before the obligation itself is named.

Germany offers one version of this process. On 5 December 2025, the Bundestag approved a new military service law by 323 votes to 272. The law keeps service formally voluntary at first, but introduces compulsory elements, including mandatory Bundeswehr questionnaires for young men and the gradual introduction of medical examinations. It also allows the Bundestag to activate needs-based conscription if voluntary recruitment falls short. The vote was accompanied by school strikes and youth protests in German cities against what participants regarded as a path back towards compulsory military service.[16]

Croatia provides a clearer case: an actual return to conscription. In October 2025, the Croatian parliament voted to reintroduce compulsory

[16] "German parliament backs controversial military service law amid Russian threat", *Reuters*, 5 December 2025; "German lawmakers approve plan to attract more military recruits that stops short of conscription", *Associated Press*, 5 December 2025; "German MPs rubberstamp military service plan amid school pupil protests", *The Guardian*, 5 December 2025; "Military service modernised", *Bundesregierung*, 5 December 2025.

military service, with two months of basic military training for young men and civilian service for conscientious objectors. Earlier opposition included a petition against the proposed reintroduction of conscription and a protest at Ban Jelačić Square in Zagreb on 27 September 2025, where organisers criticised the measure as unnecessary, unfair, gender-discriminatory, poorly compensated, and adopted without meaningful consultation with young people.[17]

In **Greece**, the same movement took a different form: not the sudden reintroduction of conscription, which already exists, but a tightening of the rules around it. From late 2025 into early 2026, the government advanced a broad military reform package, presented under the title "Roadmap for the Transition of the Armed Forces to the New Era", which included changes to conscription, training, deferments, and the organisation of military service. Students and academic bodies objected in particular to stricter study-linked deferments, warning that the new rules could interrupt medical training, doctoral work, and research careers, while worsening the very brain drain the country officially claims to lament.[18]

Italy and Austria show the wider political atmosphere in which military obligation and rearmament are being normalised.

In **Italy**, the sharpest clashes in late 2025 did not centre on a specific proposal to restore conscription. They centred on student and trade-union mobilisations against the Meloni government's education policies, 2026 budget, support for Israel, and increased defence spending,

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[17] "Croatia reintroduces military conscription as Europe worries about Russia-Ukraine war", *Associated Press*, 24 October 2025; "Croatia reintroduces mandatory military conscription after 17 years", *Al Jazeera*, 24 October 2025; "Thousands in Croatia sign petition against proposed military draft", *AFP*, 19 July 2024; "Protest against mandatory military service in Zagreb", *Tanjug/NIN*, 27 September 2025.

[18] Hellenic Republic Ministry of National Defence, "The Bill of the Ministry of National Defence 'Roadmap for the Transition of the Armed Forces to the New Era' tabled in the Hellenic Parliament", 16 December 2025; "Greek Students Protest Stricter Military Service Rules", *To Vima*, 12 December 2025; "Military bill faces academic pushback", *Kathimerini*, 11 December 2025; "Sweeping military reforms spark backlash from students and service members", *The Press Project*, 8 January 2026.

with protesters framing parts of the agenda as a creeping militarisation of public life rather than a single military-service reform.[19]

In **Austria**, the controversy has centred more directly on lengthening compulsory military service, alongside a parallel extension of civilian alternative service. The proposed change is expected to be put to a referendum. Critics, including youth representatives, warn that older cohorts of voters may effectively decide obligations that would fall overwhelmingly on young men. At the same time, parties dispute whether such a vote can be meaningful when set against wider debates over neutrality, security, and European rearmament.[20]

Despite the pushback such ideas encounter in every country, the direction remains the same. Decisions are made inside institutions and imposed by administrative means. This is an increasingly authoritarian administrative process, one that neither seeks consent from those affected nor makes any serious effort to justify the burden imposed on them.

First comes threat. Then necessity. Then preparation. Then inevitability. In the end, only implementation remains.

Along the way, the same words are repeated to the point of exhaustion: "security", "the common good", "duty", "state of emergency", "the threat of Russian aggression", "personnel shortages".

In some countries, such as **Denmark**,[21] conscription has at times been

[19] "Students across Italy protest Meloni government", *Anadolu Agency*, 14 November 2025; "Thousands strike and march in Italy against Meloni's budget", *Reuters*, 12 December 2025; "Italy's national strike called by main union disrupts transport and school services", *Associated Press*, 12 December 2025.

[20] "Austria to decide on compulsory military conscription, amid wave of European remilitarisation", *EUobserver*, 16 September 2025; "Austria's President calls for extension of military service", *Euractiv*, 12 June 2025; "Austria to hold referendum on extension of military service: Should the young have a bigger say?", *Brussels Signal*, 2 February 2026.

[21] "Indvandrere dropper forsvaret", *Politiken*, 24 April 2005.

presented as a tool of "cultural integration" and social cohesion, with sentimental accounts suggesting that involuntary service could teach newcomers to respect, and even grow attached to, local institutions and the people around them. That claim was never convincing. Too often, when people divided by unresolved ethnic, cultural, or social tensions are compelled into the same military structures, those tensions do not dissolve – they sharpen. What holds them together, if anything, is military discipline. But once military command is removed, the apparent cohesion often reverts to what it was before, or deteriorates further. Over the subsequent decades, public debate and recurring headlines have often told a very different story from the sugar-coated claims once circulated in Denmark and still recycled elsewhere under the rhetoric of the "benefits of conscription".

Whatever rhetoric is used, it all leads to the same place: a claim that someone else has the right to decide, on your behalf, what function you will perform and what purpose you will serve, in a form of service you never chose.

This is not about a mere "body" to be used by someone else. It concerns the human being as a whole – their choices, their life, and the moment at which they cease to be sovereign over themselves and are treated as property: a means to someone else's end.

This book opens by rejecting that framework.

Any claim that a person is obliged to take part in military training or any other form of involuntary service, despite their explicit refusal, is morally illegitimate. This sentence is not a slogan, nor is it a general theory of all possible obligations. It is not a rejection of the legal order as such, nor is it one of the pseudo-legal fantasies associated with the so-called "sovereign citizen" movement.

Here, "illegitimate" does not mean unlawful. Something may be codified in law and still lack moral and ethical legitimacy – a distinction long recognised in legal and moral philosophy, and one that will be revisited in Chapter 10.

This is not about refusing to pay taxes because you did not personally consent to them. It is not about refusing to obtain a driving licence or obey traffic rules on the grounds that you did not explicitly consent

to them. This is about something specific, and far more serious: being placed under compulsory military authority, trained for war, and potentially forced to take part in it against your will: to kill other human beings, to be killed, or to serve in whatever capacity is imposed upon you.

Everything else is an attempt to blur the issue by shifting the focus from the specific to the general, from the serious to the trivial, from principles to procedures.

That is why this book rejects the idea that referendums or public debate can solve the problem. In most countries seeking to introduce, restore, or expand national service, there will be no referendum. And even if there were, it would not resolve the problem, because the problem is not procedural. It is primarily ethical – and it is rarely stated openly, especially in mainstream debate.

For people like me, and for many others, the supposedly universal character of such involuntary service, whether military or civilian, also creates a personal problem: the impossibility of refusing both forms without facing sanctions in countries that maintain such a system.

That is why this book is about something else: how you prepare – in thought, in conscience, and in will – for the moment when something is demanded of you that you cannot accept. Not how to persuade others; for that, nothing works better than the force of personal example. Not how to win debates or mock irrational views. But how to hold your ground when everything – and everyone – seems to be against you.

This book will not produce a shared "truth".

The truth of an ethical individualist is fundamentally different from that of a collectivist who believes that almost anything may be demanded in the name of the collective. The two worldviews are separate planets, divided by a void. Yet we remain bound to the same Earth. When no compromise is possible – not even a theoretical balance on certain issues such as involuntary service – things do not calm down. They grow worse.

So the question is not whether things will become tense. Those with an insatiable appetite for power will not stop by themselves. They appear ready to take the next steps towards their own coercive version of "Build Back Better".[22]

Unsurprisingly, what they seem intent on "building back better" is the so-called "school of life" for servants: national service, whether military or civilian. In either case, we are expected to accept control and submit to it.

The question is whether we will be ready when they come to impose it.

* * *

[22] Build Back Better – a political slogan for post-crisis "improved" reconstruction, criticised as convenient rhetoric for absorbing public resources and legitimising contentious policies, without any guaranteed better outcome for society.

Chapter 1
"Society Demands It"

The phrasing is familiar. You hear it from politicians, analysts, official spokespeople, and institutional statements: "society demands this", "society expects it", "society has no other choice". It sounds impersonal and indisputable, as though it were a law of nature. That is precisely its function.

But "society" does not act. Specific people act in its name.

There is no mystery here. This linguistic operation has a perfectly transparent purpose.

The same mechanism allows a minority to speak in the name of a majority, and a temporary political arrangement to present itself as the enduring will of "everyone". Voter turnout below 50 per cent – as has been the case in Bulgaria for many years[23] – does not prevent politicians from speaking on behalf of "society". Dissent is treated not as a real factor, but as annoying noise.

But if this is what "society" amounts to, the question is inescapable:

Who, exactly, is making demands of me?

Not "in general". Not "in principle". Specifically: who?

Which government? Which party? Which parliament? Who claims the right to decide which forms of involuntary service I must submit to, including military training and potential participation in war? What are their names? What exactly did they vote for – and what did they vote

[23] "Voter turnout in Bulgaria has been going down, Central Election Commission says", Bulgarian National Radio, 29 August 2024; "Bulgaria – October 2024", International IDEA, 2024; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Bulgaria, Early Parliamentary Elections, 9 June 2024: Final Report*, 5 September 2024; "Country Profile: Bulgaria", IFES Election Guide, 3 May 2026.

against? Who elected them, and with what mandate? Were they elected at all, or merely appointed? Who stands behind them?

These questions are almost never answered. Instead, the same formula is repeated: "society", "the state", "the common good". The circle closes.

The reason is simple. Once the source is named, it becomes obvious that this is about people making decisions for other people. And then the aura of inevitability disappears. What remains is a claim to authority.

That claim is not based on consent. I have not given anyone my consent to decide on my behalf whether I will be placed in service to someone else. I have not authorised anyone to define this as "duty and honour" in my name. I have not granted anyone the right to invoke "society" and include me in decisions I reject.

That is why the phrase "society demands" does not bind me.

It is not an argument. It is a cover.

I, too, am part of society, and I make no such demand of other people. I do not demand that other people's sons and daughters risk their lives for mine, least of all against their will.

If the authorities introduce any form of involuntary service and claim that "society" demands it, they are attributing to me a demand I have never made.

What remains is a simpler question: on what grounds do specific people claim the right to impose involuntary service on others who have explicitly refused? Just because they can?

Until these questions are answered clearly, every "social demand" is someone else's will disguised as a collective one, claiming to stand above my own – and, very likely, above yours as well.

The conclusion is simple: either "society" excludes people like us, or the concept, as presented, is a lie. Either way, the word "society" conceals groups whose deepest commitments do not overlap – groups with different worldviews and different loyalties. That is where any honest discussion of this issue must begin.

* * *

Chapter 2
"The Common Good"

After "society demands it" comes the next formula, designed to make the demand appear not only inevitable but morally justified: "the common good".

It is one of the most convenient phrases in political language. It sounds unquestionable because it suggests something good for everyone. That is where **the first substitution** begins.

Those who speak of the "common good" rarely define it. They let it stand as a self-evident truth. At best, they point to abstract goals such as "security", "stability", and "survival". In most cases, they do not explain it at all.

But if the "common good" excludes me, many of my readers, and others like us, in what sense is it "common"?

This is not a rhetorical question. If I explicitly reject any form of involuntary service – especially compulsory military training or participation in war presented as a means of resolving crises – then I do not consent to being used for that purpose. At its extreme, that means killing strangers – perhaps even people I know – simply because the "common good" has designated them as a "common enemy". In that case, how can it be called "good" if it requires my participation against my will? Good for whom?

Either I am part of the "common", or I am not. If I am, then my refusal to accept that coercion and compulsory service imposed against my will can constitute any kind of good must matter. If I am not, then on what grounds do those who invoke the "common good" claim authority over me?

At this point, **a second substitution** is made: a vaguely defined good suddenly becomes a concrete obligation. That leap is never justified. It is treated as self-evident. But it is not.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that something like a "common good" does exist. It does not follow that every individual is obliged to take part in achieving it. Still less does it follow that individuals may be forced to do so against their will, and in ways that contradict their religious, philosophical, ethical, political, or otherwise deeply held convictions.

Even when a person chooses to help defend those close to them, they may be fully convinced that they can do so best by staying close to home: helping their family and community on their own initiative, rather than under someone else's command, far away and stripped of agency and inner motivation.

An abstraction such as "the common good" does not create any specific right or obligation.

If it did, then any claim framed as "beneficial to the majority" could be used to justify coercion against those cast as a minority – regardless of whether such a majority actually exists, or whether the coerced are in fact a minority at all. History offers enough examples of where that logic can lead when carried through to its conclusion. It remains morally indefensible in Nazi Germany, in Stalinist USSR, and cannot be defensible anywhere in the 21st century.

This brings us to **the third substitution**: morality is replaced by the desired political result.

Instead of asking whether it is permissible to force a person into disciplined obedience – whether in war, under the pretext of defence, or in any form of compulsory service – the question becomes whether the result of that coercion is "good". This reverses the order of things. The means are justified by officially declared ends.

I do not accept this logic. Not because I deny that people can voluntarily unite around goals they consider important, but because I reject the idea that anyone can turn such a goal into a "universal" obligation.

The distinction is simple and essential.

Anyone who believes in the "common good" is free to act in its fa-

vor. No one has the moral right to demand that I do the same. And if someone manufactures such a right through a legal or administrative procedure, I retain the inalienable right to answer:

You have neither moral nor ethical grounds for this. The absence of moral grounds means that your claim does not bind my conscience: it cannot override my convictions, my judgement, or my refusal. I will not comply.

The absence of ethical grounds means something more: even the defence of the homeland cannot justify coercion against me, because I, too, am part of that homeland and that society. If my freedom can be violated in its name, then the very whole you claim to defend has already been violated by yourselves through the act of violence against a harmless member of the same nation. And if I am not part of that society, on what grounds does the "homeland" demand anything from me at all?

So whenever someone invokes "the common good", it is not an argument. It is a claim – a claim that someone has the right to decide what is good for people who disagree, and to impose it on them by coercive means.

Until that claim is clearly and concretely justified, the "common good" remains nothing more than a convenient label for someone else's will. And it never is justified, because any political claim that rests on coercing people who pose no threat to others is inherently unethical.

As with "society", the question remains the same: who decides what this "good" is? And why do they believe they can impose it on me, as if I did not know what is best for myself and for those close to me? Who are these people who have never seen me, yet claim to know what is best for me – and for others they do not know either? Are they prepared to face my scrutiny in an uncontrolled media environment?

Until it is explained how a good that benefits some while violating others can still be called universal, the "common good" remains nothing more than a mask. There has never been such an answer, nor is one likely to appear. The mask remains – as it always has.

Behind it remains the same thing as always: a will not my own, striv-

ing to assert itself – and most likely over yours too.

Let them try. We may reject the lie that someone else's drive to impose involuntary service through violence constitutes "the common good". But we cannot deny that it is both persistent and brazen.

* * *

Chapter 13
“Everyone Must Contribute”

After “society demands” and “the common good” comes a formula that presents itself as practical: “everyone must contribute”, or “everyone must do their part”. It sounds like an appeal to fairness. If there is a burden, it should be shared. If there is risk, it should be distributed.

At first glance, that can sound reasonable. But then the questions begin. What exactly is being shared? Who decides how the burden is distributed? And are we truly “all in this together”?

“Everyone” is a convenient word. It creates a sense of symmetry, equality, and community. But in reality, “everyone” never means everyone.

Let us see what this “everyone” looks like in practice.

In many political systems, members of parliament enjoy legal immunities. Unlike most citizens, they cannot be detained or prosecuted without a special procedure.

Diplomats cross borders and pass through checkpoints under a different set of rules. At airports, they may have separate lanes. Their official bags, and in many circumstances their personal luggage, are not inspected in the same way as yours. The rules that apply to you do not apply to them in the same way.

In a number of constitutional systems, including Bulgaria’s, this asymmetry is built into the constitutional order itself. Legislators do not bear criminal liability for the opinions they express, nor for the votes by which they support or reject a given law. They can adopt norms that are binding on everyone else, yet justified only by brief statements of

intent and expected outcomes. The people on whom these norms fall do not enjoy the same immunity from their consequences. If such a law imposes military service or mobilisation, the person who refuses may be forced to justify their disobedience in far greater detail than the legislator was required to justify the obligation itself. And if they refuse, unlike a politician who enjoys immunity, they may face criminal liability.

The same asymmetry appears again in many countries, where there are categories of people legally exempt from mobilisation or effectively "armoured" against it for a certain period: by virtue of their profession, their connections, their health, or some "special contribution". At the same time, others are hunted like prey in the streets and forced into vans.

These are not random exceptions. This is how hierarchy works: part of it is codified in law, the rest is imposed in practice. "Everyone must contribute" applies only to everyone who has no access to the exceptions. This is the principle in action.

When someone says that "everyone must contribute", it means that someone else decides what "contribution" means and who is counted as part of "everyone". The word does not describe reality. It sustains the illusion that such equality exists.

This is the crucial point: "sharing" becomes an obligation.

If everyone must contribute, then the one who refuses becomes a problem – not because they directly harm anyone, but because they disrupt the scheme. They refuse to take their assigned place in the imposed distribution of burdens. Therefore, they must be compelled.

This is no longer a question of fairness. It is a question of obedience.

The formula "everyone must contribute" conceals exactly that. What matters is not whether a person agrees, but whether they fit into the scheme – and whether they are willing to comply despite their own judgement.

But I am not part of such a scheme; I did not choose it and I reject it on principle.

If someone wants to take part in collective defence, to assume risks, to act under someone else's command, or to accept a low-paid

civilian role in the name of service – that is their choice. They have a right to that choice. I do not oppose it. But it does not create an obligation for me.

Here it becomes clear why this formula is repeated so insistently. It erases the distinction between voluntary action and imposed participation. It turns a personal choice into a norm, and the norm into a universal obligation.

That is the substitution.

So whenever someone invokes "everyone must contribute", it is not an appeal to fairness. It is a demand for compliance – in this case, submission to involuntary service, which I reject outright.

The underlying question still stands: on what grounds can an imposed system for distributing involuntary burdens bind anyone, especially when it does not apply to everyone?

Until there is an answer, "we are all in this together", "everyone must contribute", and the other mantras of so-called "solidarity" remain formulas for imposing someone else's will – this time dressed up as equality.

But nothing changes the fact that hierarchy remains, and that some are "more equal" than others. Nor does anything change the fact that the opposing argument rests on an unproven assumption: that people contribute to society only under coercion. This is not true. The evidence is everywhere: volunteers in mountain rescue services, blood donors, and people who support causes with their own time and resources, without a single "mobilisation" order. In such cases, the state is not the source of the commitment; at most, it may act as a mediator, while the decision remains personal.

Many people would contribute to military or social initiatives if they were not treated as subordinates under someone's command. To some extent I count myself among them: I have on more than one occasion contributed creatively to military projects, as well as to projects of other state institutions. The absence of a unilaterally imposed hierarchy and authoritarian treatment made these collaborations possible – they were not involuntary service, but voluntary contractual relationships.

People may choose to contribute for economic, moral, practical, creative, or deeply personal reasons that cannot be imposed or anticipated from outside. Even in conditions of antipathy, such motives survive only where the relationship remains free, rather than being suppressed by coercion, excessive control, accumulated mutual hostility, and the loss of healthy distance. [24]

It is perfectly clear who benefits from distorting this picture and why: to justify their power-hungry and violent encroachments on the freedom of others.

* * *

[24] The deeper reasons why many NATO armies, including Bulgaria's, face recruitment difficulties will be discussed in Chapter 17.

Chapter 4
"Rights Come With Duties"

"You have rights; you also have duties." The formula sounds balanced; in practice, it shuts down the conversation before anything has to be explained.

In the Bulgarian context, defenders of compulsory service will immediately point to the constitutional language of "duty and honour". But that constitution was adopted by a political class and electorate that did not include me: I was not even born when the text was drafted and adopted, and I have not signed it as a personal contract. The question of what, if anything, binds a person in such a case is explored in Chapters 5 and 10.

The inclusion of the word "honour" alongside "duty" in the Bulgarian constitution – the supreme law of the land – is itself a separate abuse of language and moral authority. Although that same constitution defines Bulgaria as a secular state, the state nonetheless lays claim to a moral and spiritual category that it has no right to invoke. Honour is not a badge to be granted by authority. It is the opposite: an inner dignity that does not depend on state approval.

The formula "you have rights; you also have duties" contains other problems that are rarely examined:

First, not all rights originate from the state. States and international institutions, secular by design, often present themselves as the source of all human rights, claiming a quasi-divine authority to "grant" and "revoke" them. It is another claim without foundation.

There are inherent, inalienable rights. It is secondary whether one calls them natural or divine. They are not granted by anyone and cannot be revoked or "temporarily suspended". They exist by virtue of be-

ing human, independently of any authority.[25]

One of them is precisely the right to refuse any kind of involuntary service, including any obligation to bear arms and kill – regardless of how that obligation is justified, or whether it is justified at all. In this matter, personal conviction takes precedence over imposed obligation.

Second, rights granted by the state are revocable. They have an expiry date. Today you have them; tomorrow you do not – because of someone's whim or a justification presented as "rational". Today, you have the right not to be forcibly trained for inclusion in the mobilisation reserve and for war. Tomorrow, that "right" disappears. This is a problem in itself: some rights turn out to be almost virtual.

But there is something more important – something that directly addresses their favourite mantra: "you have rights – you also have duties."

Which existing right is supposedly meant to balance this particular "obligation"?

If it is a new right that we would receive in exchange for a forthcoming compulsory national service, what would that right be, other than the "right" to further obligations later as part of the mobilisation reserve?

Why are there long periods during which this supposedly already existing right is not tied to any form of compulsory service? Why does "you have rights, therefore you have duties" not apply during those periods?

What kind of right could possibly "compensate" for being coerced into mobilisation or into taking part in killing other people, while risking being killed myself?

In politically driven documents such as *Conscription as an element in European Union preparedness*,[26] the reader is usually told – directly or by implication – that conscription is the normal state of affairs, merely dormant or unnecessary in certain periods. That claim has at least two serious problems.

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[25] Judge Andrew P. Napolitano, "Punishing Freedom", *Creators Syndicate*, 29 May 2025.

[26] Eleni Lazarou and Panagiotis Politis Lamprou, "Conscription as an element in European Union preparedness", European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, March 2025.

First, modern conscription is not an ancient or timeless practice. Its decisive historical model is the *levée en masse* of revolutionary France from just over two centuries ago. Older systems of military obligation existed, including in Rome, but they were limited, often non-universal, and not the same thing. Conscription cannot plausibly be presented as an ancient or timeless civic tradition. Yet that is precisely what such documents often attempt to suggest.

This suggestion is especially disturbing given what that relatively short history actually shows. Mass conscription helped make possible the tens of millions of deaths in the two world wars. Conscript armies have also repeatedly been used to suppress domestic populations in many countries, including my own.

Invoking history as if it supported such a form of involuntary service reveals either profound ignorance of the subject or sheer ideological arrogance.

Second, the confidence with which someone unilaterally declares what is "necessary" is remarkable. Decades of experience across the world, together with the fact that most states today do not maintain conscription, show that it is often neither needed nor, even when deemed necessary, the best available solution.

The central claim remains unchanged: an obligation is being imposed as though it were self-evidently tied to an unnamed right. What is the causal and logical connection between that supposed right and conscription itself – a system that requires the surrender of personal sovereignty and the suspension, even if only "temporary", of a wide range of basic human rights? Is it not deeply cynical when someone explains that they are granting rights in exchange for an obligation that in fact strips away a number of fundamental rights and curtails basic freedoms?

This is not a rhetorical question. If they intend to keep invoking this hollow slogan, they owe an answer. They almost never provide one, because they have nothing meaningful to say. They know that their answer, whatever it might be, would not withstand historical, logical, or ethical scrutiny.

Let us pretend, for the sake of argument, that we are still waiting for answers. In the meantime, we can burden them with a few more questions:

What state-granted right – whether existing or yet to come – could possibly entail an obligation to kill other people or to be killed? This is not a rhetorical question.

What good are any other rights granted to me by states and secular international institutions if I do not have the one right that could truly balance such an imposed "duty": the right to refuse on grounds of conscience or conviction, without sanction and without needing approval? This is not a rhetorical question either.

I am not expecting meaningful answers. They are found neither in their official documents nor in the previously mentioned pamphlet, *Conscription as an element in European Union preparedness*, even though it does refer to the idea of conscientious objection to conscription. The way this issue is presented is both revealing and deeply objectionable: all the terms are controlled in advance, and the entire framework of the discussion is defined for us. What counts as valid conscientious objection, which state it comes from, whether such objection is even worth considering, under what conditions, and what "alternatives" to military service may be offered – all of this is treated as theirs to determine. Meanwhile, the possibility of refusing any form of involuntary service is never placed in question.

It is for me alone to decide whether I give reasons for my conscientious objection, how I do so, and before whom. I do not need their approval for my conscience, nor for my decision to exercise my inalienable rights. As for their unilateral, abstract, state-managed notion of civil rights, meant to "compensate" for attempts to impose involuntary service, they can keep it to themselves. It is not mine, and it is of no use to me.

* * *

Chapter 5
"You Owe Because You Benefit"

This is one of the most frequently repeated arguments. It appears in several formulations, but the core claim is the same: "you benefit from the state – from its institutions and infrastructure – therefore you owe something in return". It sounds logical only while it remains abstract; it begins to fall apart the moment it is applied to concrete cases.

I pay taxes. I do not have the option of choosing whether to do so, especially with taxes such as VAT, which are embedded directly in the price of goods. This is not a contract. It is an obligation – enforced, in some cases, by penalties.

Even so, I can see the rationale: taxes fund institutions and infrastructure I may use. But nowhere in the "social contract" is there a clause stating that, in order to use institutions already funded and maintained by my taxes, I am also obliged to kill people on the state's behalf, or at least to be trained to do so.

Yet the next leap is made: if you are part of this arrangement, then you owe something specific in return – involuntary military service, compulsory civilian service, or some other form of "national" service.

This leap is false.

If someone places you within a system without asking you, and then tells you, "you benefit from it, therefore you owe", that is not logic. It is a closed loop. First, they place you inside the framework. Then they use that very framework as an argument against you.

Let us say it plainly. I did not enter the state by contract. I was born into it. I live in it because I have no choice but to live somewhere. That is not voluntary participation.

And from that, it is supposed to follow that I am obliged to surrender my bodily sovereignty and personal will, to be trained for war, and to be turned into either an unwilling killer or a manufactured martyr?[27]

That no longer has anything to do with the original claim.

Paying taxes, obeying traffic rules, and being conscripted all have one thing in common: each ultimately relies on the state's monopoly on coercion. That similarity, however, does not make them morally equivalent. Taxes concern money and property. Traffic rules regulate a voluntary activity: I drive only if and when I choose to do so. Conscription is different in kind, not merely in degree. It claims authority over my body, my time, my will, and, at its extreme, my life and the lives of others.

That my own taxes should be turned against me – used to fund the very apparatus that binds me into a state-sanctioned form of involuntary servitude – is not merely unjust. It is fundamentally perverse. Behind the perversity lies a simple trick. The argument conflates ordinary legal obligations with personal subjection – it takes what I am already compelled to do and uses it to justify what I explicitly refuse. That is a manipulative substitution.

I can already hear the objection: did you just say "involuntary servitude"? Are you equating national service with involuntary servitude, or even slavery?

Legally, the systems draw distinctions. Morally, I draw no meaningful one when the service is imposed against my will. The legal frameworks in the United States and Europe do not truly escape that problem either. They do not show that compulsory service is morally different in kind from involuntary servitude; they merely carve out state-convenient exceptions.

The classic American example is the *Selective Draft Law Cases* of 1918, where the Supreme Court dealt with the Thirteenth Amendment objection to conscription by an act of judicial audacity almost impressive in its nakedness. The Court effectively held that compulsory military service could not be treated as involuntary servitude, since it belonged

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[27] True martyrs die for the defence of their faith and convictions, not on someone else's orders and out of submission born of cowardice and reverence.

to the citizen's "supreme and noble duty" to contribute to the defence of the nation's rights and honour. In other words: once the state baptises coercion as duty, the coercion is expected to disappear from view.[28]

Military conscription is not treated as wholly unrelated to the prohibition of involuntary servitude. The very fact that the Court had to address the objection is itself evidence of the connection. What follows is not a denial of that connection, but the recognition of a historically accepted exception.

In plain language, military conscription is *de facto* unconstitutional involuntary servitude. It is spared that classification not because of any essential difference, but because of state privilege: when the same compulsion has served, serves, or may serve the state, the courts stop calling it by its true name and present it, *de jure*, as something different. The double standard is not hidden. It is built into the doctrine.[29]

A similar logic appears in the European human-rights framework. Article 4 of the *European Convention on Human Rights* excludes "any service of a military character" required under compulsory military service laws from the definition of "forced or compulsory labour". In questions of compulsory service and differential treatment by sex, Strasbourg bodies have also relied on the state's "wide margin of appreciation" in matters of national defence.

In plain language, this means that the Court allows states broad discretion to practise something morally and ethically indefensible under the cover of legality, shallow historical precedent, and an almost exclusive state prerogative to decide what "national defence" requires. This sounds less like a doctrine of human rights and more like a doctrine of state entitlement.

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[28] See *Selective Draft Law Cases*, 245 U.S. 366, 390 (1918).

[29] See *Constitution Annotated*, "Exceptions Clause: Public Service"; Justia, "Situations in Which the Amendment is Inapplicable". See also David R. Henderson, Hoover Institution, essay on forced national service, quoted in the main text: "A draft is clearly involuntary servitude"; Aeon J. Skoble, "Neither Slavery Nor Involuntary Servitude", *Foundation for Economic Education*, 1 September 2003.

That legal treatment does not bind my conscience, nor does it create an absolute moral duty to submit to it.

There is another problem: the claim that voting constitutes consent to the "established order". Two cases must be distinguished here, because both lead to the same conclusion.

The first case is mine, and that of the non-voting majority around me. We have not voted for the Grand National Assembly, nor for the Constitution it adopted, nor for a parliament, nor for a president – precisely because we do not recognise any of them as our representatives. In my own case, if I had voted, there might at least be some basis for claiming that I had explicitly "consented" to the chain of decisions made by the so-called "legitimate" authorities.

More importantly, voting would not solve the problem in any case. The constitutional text and the laws connected with actual or potential compulsory service were adopted before I and many of those younger than me were even born. I do not feel bound to accept any such "inherited debt" in any personal sense, as inherited debt as a form of obligation falls among the recognized contemporary forms of slavery. On the contrary, I reject such a debt entirely.

The second case is those who do vote. They, too, have not entered into a blank contract for someone else to fill in on their behalf. Participation in elections is not consent to every future decision made by those elected – even though, in practice, it is increasingly treated that way.

A person votes for a specific programme and a specific mandate. If the elected officials later introduce compulsory national service, without having clearly declared any such intention before the election, no voter has authorised it in advance with their ballot.

In both cases – whether people vote or do not vote – no one has given the consent the system claims.

In Bulgaria, those in power still insist that they are "elected" and "legitimate". In any meaningful moral or representative sense, they are neither. Recent turnout has repeatedly fallen below 50 per cent. At best, they represent a minority – and a fragmented one at that, since that minority is divided among many parties.

What remains is the claim that you owe them simply because you were born in a place they govern. That is not an argument. It is their neo-feudal delusion – not mine.

On what grounds could someone empowered by a minority, someone I have not chosen, claim authority to impose an obligation of involuntary service that I explicitly reject? And at the level of the European Union, on what grounds could an appointed official do the same?

Until there is an answer, "you owe it because you benefit" is just another form of pressure, disguised as logic – and failing even on its own terms.

Someone may object that I benefit directly from the country's collective defence and that, by refusing this particular state-defined form of contribution, I unfairly shift the burden onto others. But that objection already smuggles in what it has not proved: that the only meaningful contribution is the one demanded by the state, in the form chosen by the state, under the command of people appointed or empowered by that same state.

I am not refusing contribution as such. I am refusing a specific imposed form of contribution: compulsory service, military training, mobilisation, and obedience to those who have not earned my trust and, in many cases, lose more of it by the day. There is a difference between contributing to security and being absorbed into an apparatus that claims the right to define security for me.

In the abstract, the objection may sound difficult to answer. In reality, it is not. It also smuggles in the naive idea that security threats always come from outside, and never from within. But when there are good reasons to believe that the gravest threats to freedom and security may come from those in positions of power – including those who command the army – then entering that apparatus is not necessarily a contribution to one's own safety or to the safety of society. It may simply mean helping to preserve the very order that makes such coercion possible. That is not moral responsibility. It is submission dressed up as fairness.

This applies no less to Bulgaria than to Germany, Britain, the United States, Russia, or any other country where people have reason to regard

their own authorities as part of the problem rather than as trustworthy guardians of their security. In the American context in particular, it is not difficult to find people across the political spectrum who would regard a renewed draft not as a civic duty, but as a provocation toward a new civil war by a state in which they no longer place their trust.[30]

Later, we will examine why the logic behind "you owe because you benefit" fails even within classical theories of the "social contract".[31]

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[30] See examples quoted in Chapter 25.

[31] See Chapter 21.

Chapter 6
"That's How Society Works"

The formula is meant to sound obvious: "That's how society works". No explanation. No stated basis. No attempt at argument.

It is merely a statement dressed up as wisdom: "nothing better has been devised so far".

Really?[32]

Let us look at what that means in practice.

In some cities, so-called low-emission zones have been introduced. If your car does not meet a certain standard, you are not allowed to enter. The fine is imposed automatically. No identifiable person has been directly and individually harmed by your action. You have simply failed to meet an administrative requirement.

In many countries, address registration is compulsory within a short period after moving. If you fail to register on time – or refuse to register at all – sanctions follow. No identifiable victim has been shown. A rule has been broken.

In a number of countries, health insurance is compulsory. If you do not pay, you do not merely lose access to services – you accumulate debt and penalties. Again: no direct harm to anyone other than yourself has been shown. A rule has been broken.

With electronic vignettes and toll systems, penalties are issued through cameras and registers. You are not stopped on the spot; there is no direct dispute. The system identifies you and penalises you – because that is how it is designed.

The same suspension of moral judgement appears in compulsory na-

[32] See the Afterword for an alternative worth considering.

tional service. The first demand is not proof that your participation is necessary, useful, or morally justified. Nor is the first question whether you are willing, motivated, fit for duty, or intend to claim conscientious objection. As in the previous examples, the first demand is compliance: obedience to the rule. Register for conscription, appear when summoned, submit to preliminary assessments and medical examinations, and enter the procedure. Only afterwards does the system decide whether you are fit for duty, whether your conscientious objection will be approved, whether your non-compliance makes you a target of the law, and whether you will be fined, imprisoned, or, by some exception, spared punishment.

This is exactly where the phrase appears: "that's how society works".

But it does not follow that everything that can be imposed is justified. "That's how society works" does not tell us whether something is ethically permissible or logically justified. Nor does it show whether it is the only possible solution, or even the best one. This formula does not begin from your conscience, your refusal, or your reasons. It first requires you to enter the system, which then decides, usually unilaterally, whether and how you fit into it. The logic is obvious: it is the logic of submission. The state apparatus asserts that whatever it decides can be imposed.

Here comes the next leap: from "it can be imposed" to "you must accept it".

That leap is false.

The fact that something happens does not make it right. The fact that it can be imposed does not make it morally or ethically legitimate. If that were true, then every form of coercion would be justified simply because it exists.

History offers enough examples of where such logic leads. By that logic, one could justify almost anything once it had been normalised: the exploitation of women, the abuse of children, coercive forms of "assisted death" targeting the elderly or people with disabilities, as well as other practices directed against groups deemed socially "non-contributing". It would be enough to say: "this is how society works".

Let us return to the specific case.

When someone says "that's how society works" in the context of compulsory military service or its civilian "alternative", they are not offering an argument. They are saying: this will happen to you, whether you accept it or not.

That is not a justification. It is a threat. The distinction matters.

I am not arguing about whether the system can impose something. In many cases, it can. In others, it merely assumes that it can, relying on most people to comply without resistance.

I am asking whether it has the moral, ethical, or even logical right to do so. These are different questions.

When these questions are dissolved into abstraction, the result is precisely the phrase "that's how society works". It shuts down the conversation by shifting the issue from "is this permissible?" to "this will happen". But that is not an answer. It is a refusal to answer.

And the question remains: why should we be expected to accept something imposed on us without sufficient justification – especially when it affects our bodily integrity, our personal will, and even our right to live according to our own conscience?

Until there is an answer, "that's how society works" is nothing more than a statement of force. At times, that force may be mild: a fine for entering a low-emission zone, a sanction for failing to register an address, penalties for unpaid health insurance, or an automated charge from a toll system. These may be relatively painless, since they ultimately tend to affect a person's money and a small fraction of their time, but do not encroach upon their body and life – not in the way involuntary service does.

One could argue that submission to such often insufficiently justified forms of coercion is itself a form of soft conditioning. But in the case of compulsory military service or its civilian "alternative", the coercion is no longer mild. It reaches into a person's body, will, time, conscience, and life.

That is why I reject the argument "that's how society works". It is morally illegitimate and logically invalid. It is also absurdly self-righteous: it invokes an abstract, virtual "society" while excluding everyone who disagrees.

Someone may object: "But aren't you being self-righteous too, telling society how it should work?"

No. I am not telling others how to live, what to agree with, or what to do. I am saying that I am not obliged to live the same way as they do, or to submit to the forms of service they accept, whether freely or under compulsion.

My position is defensive: I reject a specific claim made against me. The self-righteousness belongs entirely to those who imagine that their idea of society entitles them to my involuntary service.

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Chapter 7
"It's Tacit Consent"

When they cannot show that you have given consent, they simply invent it.

"If you live here, you must agree."
"If you use the system, you have consented."
"If you haven't left, you accept the rules."

All of this, they tell us, is "tacit consent".

The problem for them is that my refusal has never been silent, nor could it ever be mistaken for consent. I have written two previous books, dozens of articles and hundreds of social media posts, and I also share publications by like-minded people from different countries – both against involuntary service and on a number of related issues. I have entered into public conflict with a presidential adviser over his fervent support for compulsory military training. I have also explained clearly enough why I do not participate in the system – whether by refusing to vote in elections, or by refusing to accept its legitimacy through my presence in its media, despite invitations to appear there.

But I am not a special case. The principle applies to everyone: no one is required to write, protest in the streets, or otherwise signal disagreement before deciding, by their own judgement, that the time has come to do so. Yes – by personal judgement. Each person decides for themselves.

Anyone can say "no" – whenever they choose, and to whatever claim they reject, especially when that claim concerns involuntary service and the violation of inalienable rights and freedoms.

Let us see how their convenient idea of "tacit consent" works outside political slogans.

If I go to a restaurant, sit down, order, and eat – the consent is obvious. There is action, there is payment for a voluntarily chosen service, and I may even leave a tip. There is also an alternative: to cook for myself and eat at home, rather than depend on cooks, waiters, and the whole arrangement of public dining.

If I enter a shop, pick up a product, and pay for it – again, there is consent. I am not forced to buy that particular item. I am not forced to buy from that particular shop. I can abandon that purchase altogether and walk out empty-handed.

Now let us look at the opposite.

I was born in a particular state. I did not choose it. I live in it – not because I signed a contract, but because it is simply the reality I find myself in. I encounter rules. They exist regardless of my opinion of them.

Where, exactly, is the consent?

There is no signature. No act by which I have said, "I accept". No moment at which I had a real opportunity to refuse and choose an equivalent alternative.

And yet it is claimed that consent exists – because I have not left, because I have not "exited" the system.

This is not consent. It is someone else's interpretation of the motives behind a personal decision.

Leaving the country is not an equivalent alternative to "staying and agreeing". It is a completely different action with incomparable consequences: abandoning one's home, work, relationships, and starting over elsewhere. That is not an equivalent alternative, and it does not turn staying into consent.

I would put it this way: I have stayed not because I agree, but precisely so that I can publicly refuse to agree – and encourage others to do the same.

No one has the right to speak on my behalf unless explicitly authorised to do so. That is why the claim "if you are here, you accept the rules" is a presumptuous theft of my right to speak for myself.

It may also be interpreted as a form of blackmail by way of social or civic expulsion.

In the same spirit of arrogance, they also presume to explain why I – and many like me – do not vote: we are "apathetic", they say, or something equally convenient. Apathetic? Does any of this sound like apathy?

They have been told explicitly, time and again, in plain terms, that we do not recognise them as our representatives, do not support the system itself, and have no intention of empowering them. We refuse complicity in the actions of people whose judgement and moral authority are, to put it mildly, deeply questionable – including Russian, European and American politicians who continue to support such local corrupt systems. Like attracts like.

If I am here, it means only that I am here. Nothing more.

There is a further reason this counterargument – "if you are here, you accept the rules" – is so brazen. Where peacetime conscription exists, and especially during wartime mobilisation, it is common to prohibit or effectively restrict people of "military age" from leaving the country.

They keep you confined, then treat that confinement as consent.

You are, in effect, a hostage. And then they say: "If you are here, you agree".

They restrict the option to leave, and then turn the fact that one remains into evidence of consent. From that manufactured "consent", an obligation is inferred. From that "obligation", coercion and even direct force against non-compliant citizens are "justified". And from coercion as the routine answer to everything, one arrives at uncontrolled tyranny, which fires "warning" shots at human beings trying to swim across the Tisza towards freer lands; the resource that refuses to be exploited may find itself deprived even of the most inalienable right – the right to life.[33]

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[33] "Shots Fired as Ukrainian Draft Dodgers Flee to Hungary", *XpatLoop / Hungary Around the Clock*, 4 January 2024; "Біля Тиси стріляли, щоб зупинити чотирьох ухилянтів з неповнолітніми переправниками" ["Near the Tisza, shots were fired to stop four draft dodgers aided by underage smugglers"], *ZAXID.NET*, 16 July 2024.

Not one of these steps is substantiated.

So let me be clear. I have not given consent to take part in military "solutions" to crises. I have not authorised anyone to presume such consent on my behalf. And the fact that I happen to live within the borders of a particular state does not change that.

"Tacit consent" is not consent. It is a convenient fiction that replaces the absence of real consent.

If, under conscription or mobilisation, I have the option of leaving the country to make my refusal explicit, I will do so. But if, in such a situation, I am still of military age, it is entirely foreseeable that I will not be "allowed" to leave. In any case, I do not need their "permission", nor do I recognise the moral authority of laws so readily violated by those who impose them.

And the question here is precise: where is the moment at which I said "yes", or otherwise gave consent?

Until such a moment exists, there is no consent.

Let me state that explicitly and clearly: if such pressure is ever brought to bear, I will not treat manipulation or intimidation as legitimate authority – whether it comes from my own country or, even more so, from unelected bureaucrats in Brussels. Even if such authorities were legitimate, any penalties imposed for refusing to submit to involuntary service would not be worth the paper they are written on.

Why? Because they infringe on my inalienable rights: freedom of conscience, freedom of choice, privacy, and bodily integrity – including the right not to be questioned, examined, measured, classified, or registered as an "asset" for compulsory service against my will.

In light of other current events, it is worth adding one more thing: freedom of speech is another inalienable right, and totalitarian attempts to curtail it through censorship, deplatforming, algorithmic suppression, or through the speech discipline of military service, where one may not speak whenever or however one wishes, do not intimidate me – they motivate me all the more.

Such restrictions on fundamental rights may be defensible only in

narrowly defined cases in which a person poses a direct and demonstrable threat to others – for example, in cases of violence or other conduct already recognised by law as presenting an immediate danger to another person. That is not the case here. I pose no threat to society. If my refusal and my words pose any threat at all, it is only to power-hungry authorities seeking to encroach on the inherent, God-given rights and freedoms of others.

* * *

Chapter 8
States of Emergency

When "society demands it", "the common good", and "everyone must contribute" no longer suffice, the next justification is brought out – one that has circulated for decades in different guises:

"We are in an emergency."
"Given the current international situation..."
"In light of worsening personnel shortages in the armed forces..."

We have all heard these warm-up excuses, endlessly repackaged.

This is the moment when ordinary rules supposedly stop applying. Or rather, when a different regime takes over – one that, under normal circumstances, would meet resistance.

Let us look at what this means in practice.

During the pandemic, restrictions on movement were introduced, businesses were shut down, and access to public spaces was made conditional on shifting administrative requirements and certificates. Some of these measures changed from week to week. Things that had seemed unthinkable became "temporarily necessary".

In many countries, emergency measures were extended month after month. The "temporary" stretched into the long term and was eventually rebranded as a "new normal". In some areas of law and public life, the logic of these measures was never fully rolled back.

The logic of war follows a similar institutional pattern, though with far heavier consequences. I am comparing institutional dynamics, not moral scales. At the same time, I do not underestimate the impact of what functioned, in many respects, as a "pandemic rehearsal" for an

even greater power grab.

Upon the introduction of mandatory military training, fixed-term national service, or mobilisation, restrictions may suddenly appear that did not previously exist. Entire demographic groups may be banned from leaving the country. People may be stopped in the streets, forced into vans, and taken away for training or service. Refusal may bring penalties. Documents may be confiscated. Existing state interference in employment or educational status may become far more intrusive, extending directly into questions of service, deferment, and mobilisation.

All of this is justified with a single word: emergency.

But an emergency does not answer the question of whether something is morally permissible. It only explains why someone wants to do it. That distinction matters.

Having a reason to introduce a measure does not mean that imposing it on every individual is justified – especially when it involves direct interference in their lives.

Here the key leaps in logic are made: "it is an emergency" becomes "we have no choice", and from there, "you must comply". That leap, again, is not justified. The conclusion does not follow from the premise; it is a fallacy dressed up as common sense.

The fact that a situation is severe – or presented as such – does not automatically create a right to impose any particular response on people who reject it.

History is full of examples of "emergencies" being used to expand powers that are later difficult to roll back. Once introduced, such measures rarely disappear completely.

Julius Caesar was declared dictator in response to a civil war. Later, Augustus received extraordinary powers "to stabilise" the shaken state. He returned none of them.

In Germany, Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution provided for emergency decrees in the event of "a threat to public order" – a provision conceived as a safety valve. Following the Reichstag fire of 1933, it was used to enact the *Decree for the Protection of the People and the State* – a

"temporary" measure that remained in force as the legal foundation of the regime until 1945. The emergency was never lifted; it was simply normalised.

Germany's *Solidaritätszuschlag* – introduced as a "temporary" tax in 1991 to fund reunification – was largely abolished for most taxpayers only in 2021, and even then not entirely. That is thirty years of "temporary".

The French emergency law of 1955, introduced during the Algerian War, was activated again sixty years later following the Paris attacks of 2015 – the precedent and the instrument were there, ready to be used.

The PATRIOT Act was passed in the United States as a "temporary" response to the events of 11 September 2001; the expanded mechanisms of mass surveillance that it legalised have continued for more than two decades after the "emergency" moment, even though they were exposed by Edward Snowden.

Hungary's state of emergency of 2020, introduced on account of the pandemic, was formally lifted. But it gave rise to constitutional changes that remain. The emergency retreats; its consequences do not.

Frameworks tend to expand, but they rarely contract. They persist as instruments, ready to be deployed again – likely in new ways. For example, in the United States, the draft system has been moved towards automatic registration through already existing federal data sources. Once such systems are built, they are unlikely to be dismantled.[34]

That is why an "emergency" is not merely an explanation. It is a door through which decisions pass that would otherwise meet resistance.

From my perspective, the issue still does not change. Whether or not

[34] Selective Service System, "About Selective Service", on automatic registration under the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act and integration with federal data sources; Selective Service System, *Fiscal Year 2026–2030 Strategic Plan*, on implementation by December 2026; Nick Turse, "Trump Administration Wants to Make It More Difficult to Evade a Military Draft", *The Intercept*, 10 April 2026.

there is an emergency, the same question applies: on what grounds does anyone have the right to force a person into involuntary service – into military training, and then into participation in war as a mobilised reservist – despite that person's explicit refusal? The question becomes even sharper when such service is imposed in peacetime.

Whatever answer they offer, the "emergency" justifies nothing. It only reveals how far they are willing to go under the cover of supposedly "extraordinary" and "temporary" changes in law and policy. They may try to deprive people of their freedoms outright. Or they may leave the choice formally intact while making its exercise prohibitively costly, practically impossible, or punishable in effect.

But whatever they try, the fear of punishment often does more work than the punishment itself. If we are convinced of our position and our choice regarding involuntary service, we must be prepared to stand firm against state power when it runs amok and starts crossing every line – **as is happening in Ukraine with the so-called "busification" practices**. It is precisely such disgraceful actions that will serve as the clearest evidence and the strongest motive for upholding our view that such states deserve neither our bodies nor our loyalty.

* * *

Chapter 9
“If You Won’t – Who Will?”

When they cannot justify the obligation they impose, they shift the burden of proof onto you — and make you carry it.

“If not you, then who?”
“What if everyone refuses?”
“Who will protect your loved ones?”
“Who will be sent in your place if you refuse?”

This is not an argument. It is an attempt to impose guilt.

Let us see how this works once the slogans are removed.

If an emergency or a violent incident occurs in a neighbourhood, no one can point to a random passer-by and say, “you will intervene – because otherwise, who will?” That is not a rule. It is pressure.

If there is a fire, there are emergency services, volunteers, and people who choose to act. They have chosen to be trained so that they can respond effectively and competently when needed. You do not pick random people off the street and tell them, “if you don’t enter the burning building, who will?”

In normal situations, responsibility is either voluntary or clearly assigned through defined roles. It is not created through moral pressure placed on a random individual.

And yet the same formula is used for something far more serious: training in obedience, potentially followed by participation in war.

“If not you, then who?” means one thing: someone has to do it, so it will be you.

That is not logic. It is a forced transfer of responsibility and burden.

It is remarkable how some people exempt themselves from what they claim to be a universal social obligation, yet place that burden squarely on others – without seeking consent and without even allowing the questions of personal choice and ethics to arise in the first place.

Here comes the next substitution: from a specific situation to a general obligation.

Even if there is a need for protection, it does not follow that every individual is obliged to participate in a way they do not accept. People make different choices. Some choose to take part. Others do not.

Those of us who refuse to participate in the state-prescribed way may still contribute in our own way – if, when, and how we deem it appropriate. That may include forms of action we consider more effective in directly protecting those close to us.

When authorities and their supporters say "if not you, then who", they ignore something essential: no problem, however severe, gives anyone the right to coerce a particular person into a course of action chosen by others, against that person's will – especially when that person may see alternatives the majority cannot see.

If someone believes a cause is important enough to demand sacrifice, they should be ready to demonstrate that sacrifice personally – not by staging a photoshoot in military uniform for a magazine cover. That – personal sacrifice – is what a choice looks like. Demanding it from others who do not agree – while those making the demand and their children bear none of that burden – is something else entirely.

So when they ask, "if not you, then who", the answer is simple: the one who chooses to do so. Not the one who is compelled.

The questions at the beginning of this chapter can be answered just as directly:

"If not you, then who?" – Those who believe in the cause and choose to act. When the state says, "if not you, then who?", it is admitting its own failure to build a sustainable, voluntary, and motivated defence system, and attempting to fill the gaps with the bodies of the unwilling.

"What if everyone refuses?" – In such a hypothetical and rather naive scenario, it would mean that the state had lost all practical legitimacy and that, in reality, there was nothing left worth defending. The absurdity belongs to the question, not to the answer: if everyone refuses, the fiction of a recognised obligation collapses completely.

Legitimacy is not wrung out of laws like water from a rag, but arises from the genuine will of the people. If that will does not exist on the scale implied by the question, "But what if everyone refuses?", then the state is merely a hollow framework with no right to demand anything.

"Who will protect your loved ones?" – The people who are actually with them, including me, in ways of my choosing. Not those sent far away to fight a war – rebranded as "defence".

"Who will have to go in your place if you refuse?" – Those asking the question, if they are truly convinced that going to war is unavoidable. I have no place in it.

If anyone genuinely believes that I have a "reserved place" in war, military training, or any other form of involuntary service simply because the state has unilaterally reserved such a place for me, then that person has confused their own delusions with reality.

But the central question remains, and this time it is very simple: on what grounds does someone else's choice become an obligation for a person who has explicitly refused involuntary service?

Until there is an answer, "if not you, then who" is nothing more than a form of pressure. Whatever form that pressure takes, I do not yield.

* * *

Chapter 10
"A Democratic Decision"

When they cannot justify the substance of a decision, they point to the procedure:

"It was voted in parliament."
"It was decided democratically."
"There is a law."

Let us see what that means in practice. I will use an example I know well: my own country. I have no wish to burden foreign readers with local detail for its own sake, but I am convinced that they will recognise similar patterns of state-imposed decisions in their own countries. Such examples force us to ask a more basic question: **what, in fact, is democracy?**

In Bulgaria, voter turnout has been below 50 per cent for many years. This means that the parliaments and governments formed through these elections rest on the votes of a minority of those eligible to vote. The rest stay away from the polls for different reasons. For me, and for those who share my views, the reason is simple: we recognise none of them as our representatives, and we sympathise with a different social order.

Yet those same officeholders still claim authority to make decisions binding on everyone, including people who neither elected them nor recognise them as legitimate representatives. And if the same logic were ever extended to matters as grave as conscription or mobilisation, we would no doubt be told that this, too, had been decided "democratically".

This is not a purely hypothetical concern; the events surrounding Bulgaria's adoption of the euro create precisely such a precedent for comparison. The adoption of the euro met significant public opposition[35] and was perceived by many citizens as politically imposed rather than publicly agreed through broad democratic consent. This does not mean that I necessarily oppose the currency itself. My objection is to the way the process was conducted, including disputes over whether the convergence criteria were assessed transparently and credibly.[36]

Repeated refusals to allow a referendum on the issue also give me strong reason to doubt that any referendum would be permitted if those in power ever proposed the introduction of "national service".[37] The issue is increasingly being framed as a common European policy line. The degree of institutional synchronisation at EU level – visible in the process of adopting the euro – makes it difficult to expect genuinely independent national decisions. For these reasons, I see no rational basis for expecting a referendum on the question of military conscription. Not in the current climate, and especially not under what would almost certainly be pressure to align with EU-level policy.

Where, exactly, is the democracy – the rule of the people?

I did not vote for these officeholders. I did not authorise them to decide on my behalf in this matter. I did not grant them authority to determine whether I will take part in compulsory military training, in war, or in any other form of involuntary service. Even if I had voted, it would have made no meaningful difference: the machine is driven by external centres of power, while any local parliamentary vote to legalise compulsory national service would be little more than a façade. And yet, if such

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35 "Protests against Euro Changeover Held in Several Bulgarian Cities", *Bulgarian News Agency (BTA.bg)*, 17 December 2025.

36 "Has Bulgaria gamed its inflation numbers to qualify for the euro?", *Politico*, 20 June 2025.

37 "Bulgarian president proposes a referendum on euro zone entry", *Reuters*, 12 May 2025; "Bulgarian parliament rejects president's euro referendum proposal", *Reuters*, 13 May 2025.

a decision were made, I would be told that I had to obey – because their "democratic procedures" had been followed.

Here again, a substitution takes place: "the procedure was followed" becomes "the decision is ethically legitimate and morally binding on everyone". That does not follow.

A procedure may be valid within a system. That does not mean it creates an obligation for every individual without their consent, and in defiance of their conscientious objection and explicit refusal.

If a majority votes for something that directly affects a minority, that alone does not make it morally or ethically acceptable. History offers enough examples of decisions that were "legal" at the time and are now recognised as unacceptable.

* Slavery was legal.
* Racial segregation was legal.
* The denial of basic rights to women was legal.

Legality is not the same as legitimacy – especially moral and ethical legitimacy. At its core, morality is simple: do not do to others what you would not want done to you.

Democracy – or what passes for it today – is not a guarantee that the majority is always right. It is a mechanism for producing decisions. That mechanism does not make the content of a decision morally binding on every individual – especially when that decision directly affects their body, their life, and their conscience.

There is also something that is rarely stated openly. What is presented today as a "democratic decision" on national service has a particular feature: its burden will fall on people who, at the time the decision is made, are either unborn or minors with no right to vote. They will bear the consequences of a "democratic decision" in which they could not participate. This is not a minor procedural detail. It is a structural flaw

in the very claim of "democratic legitimacy".[38]

The same problem appears across time. Entire generations were effectively born into an obligation of military service – with no recognised right to object and no alternative in the form of civilian service. This, too, was formally "democratic". Even today, it remains debatable how far the right of conscientious objection is truly recognised, given that it often leads only to another form of involuntary service: perhaps with less institutional control, less demand for submission to another's will, and fewer physical dangers – but no less degrading, and no less imposed through pressure or coercion.

That is why "it was decided democratically" does not answer the real question – the same question that runs through every chapter of this book: on what grounds does such a decision bind me, as an adult with a clear position, or anyone else who has not consented to it? And on what grounds does it bind young people who could not take part in those "democratic procedures" because they were still children at the time – whether or not they already had views on the matter?

Not that I expect an answer.

A "democratic decision" is just a procedure. A procedure, by itself, does not give those who wield power the right to coerce individuals – whether those individuals are a minority or, in Bulgaria's case, a non-voting majority.

Of course, they will insist that they have such a right. But their claims will remain just that – claims – unless they are accepted. When it comes to any form of involuntary service, I have never accepted such claims, and I never will.

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[38] See "Swiss voters reject bid to scrap military conscription", *Reuters*, 22 September 2013; "Neutral Austria votes to keep military draft", *Reuters*, 20 January 2013. The Swiss and Austrian conscription referendums are often presented as democratic models, yet they still excluded part of the population most directly affected by the result; in that sense, they were procedurally electoral, but not fully democratic. This is precisely why, as argued earlier, even a referendum cannot resolve the core problems of involuntary service addressed in this book.

Chapter 11
"You Have Options": Civilian Service

When outright coercion becomes harder to defend, a "softer" option is offered:

"You don't want to serve in the army – there is civilian service for people like you."

This is presented as a choice. It is not.

The form changes; the principle does not.

In both cases – whether the imposed service is military or civilian – someone else decides how my time, my labour, and my life will be spent, for purposes I reject as unacceptable. I was not even included in the discussion. Frankly, there is nothing to discuss: I have already made my decision about my own life, and it is not open to reconsideration.

It makes no difference whether the service is armed or not. The foundation is the same: a claim of authority over me – over the use of my life and labour – based on grounds I do not accept and never will, because they violate inalienable rights I claim and exercise.[39]

[39] Every individual decides for themselves whether and how to exercise their own rights; only an authorised person may act on another's behalf. This is why I write primarily in the first person on this matter, given its legal and polemical dimensions. At most, I assume that some readers may share these views, in whole or in part. Beyond that, I do not presume to speak in anyone else's name, nor to exercise or defend rights that are not mine. From a strictly factual standpoint, I was removed from the military roster years ago. When I write as though I am personally under potential threat of compulsory national service, that is a polemical device, not an expression of concern for my own freedom. This does not mean, however, that I am indifferent to how young people who matter to me may be used.

That is why this so-called alternative service is no alternative at all. It is the same demand in different camouflage.

Let me put it plainly. I am not arguing about whether it is "better" to serve without a weapon. I am arguing about whether anyone has the right to compel me into any form of involuntary service at all – against my moral, philosophical, religious, or political convictions.

If no such right exists for military service, it does not exist for civilian service either – nor for any form of "national service", as it is now called. The name is chosen to sound patriotic and acceptable, and to suggest that the practice is something other than what it is: an institutionalised form of coercion imposed on the individual's will and labour.

A few clarifications are necessary.

The coercive nature of the arrangement becomes clearer once we look at how "alternative" civilian service is actually structured. The state does not merely say, "You may serve without a weapon." It defines the acceptable forms of that service, its duration, its recognised institutions, its approved positions, and the procedure by which a person is assigned. In other words, the supposed alternative is not freely chosen by the individual. It is designed, limited, and administered by the same authority that imposed the original obligation.

The choice is illusory: what is on offer is not freedom, but a menu of unfreedoms.

This can be seen in different forms across countries with conscription. In some systems, the state defines the permitted fields of service and the institutions in which such service may be performed. In others, it maintains registers of approved service locations, or recognises only certain organisations as valid hosts. The form varies, but the principle remains the same: the objector is not released into freedom, but redirected into another state-defined channel.

One example makes the mechanism unusually visible. In 2026, **Russia's** Ministry of Labour expanded the list of positions available for alternative civilian service to 363 entries, while the number of or-

ganisations where such service may be performed rose to 1,927.[40] The list is tied to official occupational classifications and includes both civilian state institutions and civilian positions connected with the armed forces. This is not freedom of conscience. It is administrative reassignment.

The European examples are usually less visibly bureaucratic, but not different in principle. In **Switzerland**, civilian service requires one and a half times as many days as the remaining military service obligation, covers defined areas of activity, and must be performed through approved assignments. The person may search for a placement, but if no agreement is reached or if they wait too long, the Federal Office for Civilian Service chooses an assignment for them. A 2026 amendment, put to a referendum, was explicitly framed by the Swiss authorities as a way to keep civilian service an exception and reduce the number of people opting for it.[41]

Finland follows the same logic through a different administrative form. Non-military service lasts 347 days: a basic training period followed by work service. The work is performed at service locations approved by the Centre for Non-Military Service, which is responsible for implementation, training, and guidance within the system. The official service centre states that, after acceptance, a person receives a written order to enter service; if they do not choose a training period, an order will be issued anyway within a specified period. If there is no legal impediment and the person does not enter non-military service, a wanted notice may follow.[42]

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[40] "Минтруд расширил список профессий для альтернативной службы" ["The Ministry of Labour expanded the list of professions for alternative service"], *Mail.ru*, 3 May 2026.

[41] See *ch.ch*, "Civilian service", on the duration, recognised areas of activity, ZiviConnect assignments, and assignment by the Federal Office for Civilian Service where no assignment is agreed; *Swiss Federal Council*, "Amendment to the Civilian Service Act", on the 2026 vote and the stated aim of keeping civilian service an exception.

[42] "Non-military service", Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment; "Non-Military Service", Centre for Non-Military Service.

Germany offers another instructive example. Compulsory military service was suspended in 2011 rather than abolished outright, and recent legislation has begun restoring the first stages of the conscription apparatus: mandatory Bundeswehr questionnaires for young men, required medical evaluations introduced in stages, the classification of fitness, and the creation of a pool of potential recruits. Actual service is still described as voluntary for now. But the point is precisely that conscription does not begin only when a man is handed a weapon. It begins when the state registers him, examines him, classifies him, and stores him as available human material.

Historically, Germany's alternative civilian service was not an open-ended personal choice either. It operated through state-recognised structures and service places, mainly in social and care-related fields. The lesson is not merely historical: as Germany drifts back towards compulsory service, the state also returns to deciding what counts as a valid alternative.

Austria also treats civilian service as a state-administered substitute, not as a free civic contribution. A man cannot simply choose civilian service as his own way of helping society. He must first pass through the military enlistment procedure and be found fit or partially fit by the Bundesheer; only then may he submit a civilian-service declaration within the prescribed time limits.

The declaration itself follows a legally prescribed formulation: the citizen must state that, on grounds of conscience, he refuses to use armed force against other human beings except in self-defence or in the provision of emergency assistance, and that military service would therefore place him in a crisis of conscience. Once accepted, he is not released into self-directed civic work. He receives an administrative determination of civilian-service liability, may express preferences only within approved fields and institutions, and is assigned through the civilian-service system.

The Austrian framework no longer examines the sincerity of conscience through a commission, as it did before 1991; but the state still defines the required declaration, the deadlines, the grounds on which it may be rejected, the recognised institutions, and the final assignment.

Again, the individual is not simply left to decide how to help society; the state defines the acceptable channels.[43]

Sweden and Denmark show both the common pattern and its variations. **Sweden** places service inside a broader framework of total defence duty, where military and civilian forms exist within a state-defined system. **Denmark** allows conscripts to apply for conscientious-objector status and be transferred to civilian service, but even there the refusal must be submitted within a limited procedural window after receiving call-up papers. That, too, is a restriction: conscience is recognised only if it presents itself in the proper form and at the proper time.

Norway, by contrast, shows – as will become clearer below – that a less restrictive approach is possible, since even active service members may apply for conscientious-objector status.

At the opposite end of the spectrum stands **Turkey**: there is no civilian alternative to military service, and conscientious objection is treated through the machinery of draft evasion or desertion, with fines and prosecutions.[44]

Greece and **Cyprus** show similar patterns. Alternative service is tied to public institutions, government agencies, or state-approved arrangements, with ministries and special commissions playing a central role in recognising objectors and determining where service may be per-

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[43] See *oesterreich.gv.at*, "Civilian service", on declaration, assessment, assignment to a community service institution, assignment notice, start of service, and deferment; *EUROMIL*, "Conscientious objection in European armed forces: update", on Greece and Cyprus; *German Bundestag*, "On a National Mandatory Military Service", 2022, on the suspension of compulsory military and community service in Germany in 2011.

[44] See *Plikt- och prövningsverket*, "In English", on Sweden's total defence duty, military service, and civilian service; *Krisinformation.se*, "Total defence duty", updated 6 March 2025; *EBCO*, "Denmark", 2024, on the time limit for applying for recognition as a conscientious objector after receiving call-up papers; *Life in Denmark*, "Military service in Denmark", 4 February 2026; *EBCO*, "Norway", 2024, on the possibility for serving members of the armed forces to apply for conscientious-objector status; *UK Home Office*, "Country policy and information note: military service, Turkey", July 2025, section 3.8.3; and *European Court of Human Rights*, Kanatlı v. Türkiye, press release, 12 March 2024.

formed. Whether the framework is expressed through a numbered list of professions, approved organisations, public-sector placements, or ministerial decisions, the result is the same: conscience is recognised only inside a structure the state itself controls.

Bulgaria belongs in this picture as well, even though conscription is not currently in force. I write here not as an outside observer, but as someone who remembers the environment in which alternative service existed. It was not widely avoided because young men were eager for military service. It was avoided because the "alternative" was unattractive by design: much longer than military service, poorly paid, narrow in the range of possible placements, and often reduced to low-skilled work that few would willingly choose, even for better wages. In such an environment – marked by nepotism, institutional corruption, and the everyday knowledge that official channels were rarely the only channels – many preferred other ways of escaping involuntary service: faster, more reliable, and often carrying a price of their own.

I would be surprised if this logic were unique to Bulgaria. Private memoirs, family histories, and archival material from other European countries point in the same direction. So does material from the United States during the period of conscription before its end after the Vietnam War. The pattern is familiar: where the state turns young men into a resource, unofficial ways of avoiding or delaying service for as long as possible tend to appear around the machinery of compulsion. They may involve personal connections and favours, medical certificates used to obtain exemptions, or other arrangements.[45]

[45] For a few indicative examples, see: John Crowley, "Selective Service", *Harper's Magazine*, September 2015 (first-person account of attempting to manipulate pre-induction screening and obtaining a psychiatrist's letter used at the induction examination); James Fallows, "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?", *Washington Monthly*, October 1975 (personal essay on deliberately meeting under-weight criteria to fail the draft physical); Paul Skilleter, *Mike Hawthorn: Golden Boy* (Paul Skilleter Books, 2008; revised paperback ed., 2014), on Hawthorn's liability for National Service and how racing commitments and timing intersected with call-up; Claude Berri (dir.), *Le Pistonné* (France, 1970).

None of this should surprise us. The concept of involuntary service itself rests on moral corruption; everything else follows from that.

Norway is a partial exception, but not a simple one. It abolished alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors in 2012. Approved conscientious objectors are exempted from service, which is an important difference from systems that merely transfer them into another form of involuntary service. Yet this is not absolute freedom from state claims: EBCO notes that approved objectors may still be ordered to serve in the Civil Defence until the year they turn 55, with training obligations and possible service in a crisis. Norway therefore shows that even a more liberal arrangement can preserve residual forms of compulsory national service.[46]

These examples matter because they expose the falsehood of the word "option". The civilian route is not an option in the ordinary sense. It is not an independent path chosen by conscience. It is an authorised substitute, defined and supervised by the same power that claims the right to use the person in the first place.

The first technique by which this false choice is maintained is "approval". Conscientious objection is not treated as a person's own sovereign decision. It is treated as something to be inspected, judged, and either permitted or denied. By whom? Not by conscience itself, not by the individual whose life is being claimed, but by the state – and in some countries by commissions embedded in or working directly alongside the military structures whose claim the objector rejects.

This is not a minor procedural detail. It is the heart of the abuse. The person who refuses military service is made to ask permission for that refusal to count. He must submit his conscience to the same power that demands his service. In countries such as Russia, the logic is especially naked: the application for alternative civilian service is handled by the draft commission itself – the same structure involved in the call-up

[46] European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, *Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2021*, Norway section; "Norway", European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, 2024.

campaign, medical examination, and allocation of young men to different branches of the armed forces. The body that helps deliver the required number of conscripts is also allowed to decide whether a man's refusal to become one of them is "approved".

The second technique is no less revealing. The process does not end with submitting reasons for refusing military service and waiting for "approval". Before that refusal is recognised, pacifists, religious objectors, and political objectors may still be required to pass through the same machinery as those willing to serve with weapons. That machinery includes standardised questionnaires, call-up procedures, detailed medical examinations, assessments of fitness, and the same administrative sorting of bodies, capacities, and usefulness. In other words, even the refusal is processed through the very system the objector may reject.

This is biopolitics in its most intimate form: the treatment of a person as property and the use of that person as a resource. When the state says "choose your form of service", it does not offer a choice. It creates the illusion of choice, to provide quasi-moral cover for different forms of the same coercion.

Civilian service does not escape the logic of conscription. It translates that logic into another administrative language. The weapon may disappear, but the claim over the person remains.

This is not about a "better" or "worse" alternative. It is about the fact that no real alternative is offered at all. None of the offered options escapes the logic of punishing people for acting according to conscience, including when conscience requires refusing the options imposed on them. A person must find their own alternative, and that begins by saying "no" to the limited options imposed from outside.

When the state claims the right to assign you – here or there, with or without a weapon – it treats you as a resource.

If you can be assigned, in their eyes, you are not a person. You are a resource – no matter how they frame it or try to soften it.

And resources do not decide for themselves – others decide their function and purpose.

For some, that may be acceptable – especially if they find clarity in orders rather than in the burden of judgement. What suits someone else is not necessarily good for me – and vice versa.

That is why "civilian service" solves nothing for people like me. It only confirms the principle: that someone claims the right to decide how other people will be used for the purposes of those in power.

I do not recognise that self-appointed right, nor do I feel any obligation to comply with it.

And the central question, restated in a new form, remains: on what grounds can anyone turn me, or anyone else, into a resource for ends we do not accept – regardless of how that coercion is packaged?

Without a clear and defensible answer, the "alternative" is just another name for the same thing: coercion masked as choice. No one with a sense of human dignity should feel obliged to accept a false dilemma. There is always a third, fourth, or fifth option – options that governments and the mainstream media would prefer us not to see.

All other "unauthorised" options begin with refusing to play by someone else's rules in a game you can never win. You will not win by playing fairly. Nor will you win by playing unfairly – because you are playing against those who have mastered the sordid art of cheating.

That is why, above all, each person must find for themselves the decisive move that takes them entirely out of the rigged game. No one can prescribe it from the outside. Each person stands in a unique position, with their own resources, relationships, risks, and openings.

That uniqueness is not a weakness. It is precisely this that makes refusal unpredictable, and the decisive move impossible for the opponent to anticipate in advance. What works for one person may fail for another. Each must decide what works for them. Those who keep asking, searching, and knocking on the right doors at the right time may ultimately find a way out.

Chapter 12
Security vs. Freedom

"Security or freedom": that is the formula. It appears in different forms, but the message is the same: to have security, you must give up freedom.

That, however, is another false dichotomy – and a manufactured one. As if no third option exists.

Let us look at what this means in concrete terms.

In its most basic sense, freedom means retaining the right to choose, including the right to refuse, whether in matters of involuntary service or any other measure that requires the violation of inalienable human rights, or the "temporary" suspension of civil rights.

The state's notion of security means being trained and made available to take part in war or, for those who prefer euphemisms, "armed defence". Those of military age are therefore expected to accept that, in the context of compulsory military service, national security overrides their personal freedom of choice whenever that freedom does not align with the state's demands. That is not an argument. It is a framing imposed by one group of people on another.

Once again, the individual is being pulled into someone else's game, where others set the rules as they go along – and rewrite them whenever it helps them win.

If security requires my participation against my will, it is not security for me. It is someone else's security, achieved at my expense.

If my freedom is suspended or overridden in order to "guarantee" security, then that security is not shared. In that case, there is no security for me – only the insecurity produced by crushing my individuality and will.

My security is inseparable from my freedom. Without freedom, there is no security – only varying degrees of control. The most secure prison is still a prison, and no free person chooses to live there.

The crucial substitution is this: security is presented as a universal good, while freedom is reduced to a personal preference.

That reverses the moral order entirely.

Freedom is not a preference. It is the condition that makes choice possible at all. And it is the ability to choose, especially in the face of serious decisions, that gives a person a sense of security and control over their own life.

So when someone says, "you must sacrifice freedom for security", they are not talking about their freedom.

They are talking about yours.

If they truly believe their version of security is so important, they are free to act accordingly – to train, to take part, to assume risk, to serve in any capacity and for any cause they choose. That is for them to decide. To demand the same from me – and from you – is something else entirely.

The central question returns in its simplest form: who gets to decide what part of my freedom, or yours, should be sacrificed – and expect us simply to accept that decision?

Without a clear answer, "security or freedom" is not a choice. It is another manufactured dilemma. It works only where people have been taught not to understand freedom, not to exercise it, and to settle for a false sense of security.

I am not one of them.

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Chapter 13

This Is Not "Sovereign Citizen" Nonsense

Whenever someone refuses to be treated as a resource, the same convenient substitution appears:

"He's one of those sovereign citizens – a TikTok-and-YouTube lawyer."

The aim is obvious: to equate a position with a caricature so it never has to be addressed on its merits. File it under "eccentric", "fringe", "unhinged" – and move on without answering anything.

So the distinction here must be explicit.

Refusal to submit to involuntary service or participation in war has nothing to do with claims like:

"I don't recognise laws" – as if all laws were inherently illegitimate.

"I don't need a driving licence to travel" – as if "travel" necessarily meant operating a motor vehicle.

"I have a natural right to shelter, so I can live on someone else's property rent-free" – and similar "sovereign" clichés.

Such claims often deny the legitimacy of basic rules and ordinary relationships between people. They treat life in a shared space as incompatible with any constraints at all. They often lead to demands that would violate other people's freedom.

That is not my position. On the contrary, my position is that the state and its defenders are the ones attempting to violate my freedom when it comes to conscription, mobilisation, or other forms of involuntary service.

I do not claim that there are no laws, or that there should be none. I do not claim that there are no contracts. Nor do I claim that contracts, once entered into, need not be honoured.

My claim is specific: there is no moral right to compel me into military training or participation in war against my explicit refusal. That refusal is also grounded in the conviction that there may be peaceful, better, and more sustainable ways of addressing regional and global problems.

Furthermore, I argue that there is no ethically or logically defensible reason to insist on "alternative" service. It is also involuntary and can easily become a tool of authoritarian indoctrination. Through it, everyone is drawn into the same imposed "equality" in misery. In many countries, in fact, "alternative" service functions as little more than legalised punishment for refusing military service – longer in duration than military service, and with even more degrading levels of pay, if any at all.

None of this, however, should be confused with "sovereign citizen" nonsense. The difference is fundamental: it is one of principle.

My position in a single sentence: I do not reject all laws, all contracts, all courts, or all ordinary obligations; I reject the presumed right of the state to coerce me into any form of involuntary service despite my explicit refusal.

A driving licence is a condition for a specific regulated activity. If I do not drive, I do not need one.

A tenancy agreement is a voluntary contract. If I sign it, it binds me. If I do not, it does not. And once signed, I can also terminate it under the agreed terms.

In both cases, there is a prior choice.

Compulsory service – military or civilian – is not a choice. It is not a condition attached to any freely chosen activity. It is not a contract. It is not a voluntary arrangement.

It is an imposition. It is a demand that I accept being used for purposes that go against my will – purposes I find repugnant.

That is the difference.

Refusing to be treated as a resource is not a rejection of reasonable and ethical rules. It is a rejection of a specific claim – that someone has the right to dispose of me as if I were property.

Conflating this with "I don't recognise laws" is convenient because it avoids the real question. And the question is simple:

On what grounds does anyone have the right to decide that I must submit to involuntary service – including, potentially, participation in war? In a war they may have helped create, failed to prevent, or chosen to enter? Since they cannot justify this claim, they tend to present the situation as one imposed by external forces beyond their control. They then claim to have no choice but to respond with "defence" – a familiar historical pattern, and one that can reasonably be expected to persist.

The very idea is perverse enough: the same people who helped create the crisis, or failed to prevent it, now present themselves as the solution. The next step is for them to pass a law making their obsessions compulsory for everyone – not only their military fetishes, but whatever else they choose to impose.

I have not noticed such questions preoccupying "sovereign citizens" – they are concerned with different ones:

Can I drive without a licence?
Do I have to pay rent?
Does a judge's ruling even count?

Those are not my questions. My question is different: whether I will allow myself to be used as a mere resource and treated as an object without a will of my own.

These are fundamentally different things. Blurring them is not an argument – it is another substitution. I do not accept it.

One further point is necessary. My position demands nothing from anyone else. It does not prevent anyone from living as they see fit – to organise, to train, to take part in collective defence, or to place themselves under commanders of their own choosing.

So-called "sovereign citizens" typically reject even the most basic established rules and relationships in society. They disregard the safety

and rights of others in ordinary shared spaces and direct everyday interactions – for example, by driving without a licence, proper training, or legal authorisation, or by treating another person's property as if it were theirs to occupy.

By contrast, I demand to be left outside a specific imposed relationship that is neither natural nor contractual, but arbitrary – and one I have not accepted. Involuntary service, whether military or civilian, is not my choice.

The difference is both principled and practical.

I am not making a universal claim that "without consent, I am not bound". On the contrary: if I drive, I am required to have the necessary documents; otherwise, I would rightly be seen as a risk to others on the road. If I am in a courtroom, it is not enough to shout "I do not consent!" to make a ruling or a sentence disappear.

I am making a more precise claim: no logical or ethical principle obliges anyone to accept an imposed obligation amounting, in substance, to involuntary servitude. This position is grounded in inalienable rights. In the event of a clash of irreconcilable views, it also asserts that those rights stand above the contrary demand of the state.

I am not naive: I understand that my refusal to recognise or comply with such laws would not, by itself, be sufficient in a courtroom. There, outcomes would depend on the arguments presented, the circumstances of the case, and how the judge weighs the clash between inalienable rights and involuntary service, as well as how that discretion is exercised in practice.

If I were convicted, or otherwise punished by law, it would not make me feel guilty. It would not mean my position had been rejected on its merits. It would mean only that it had been set aside because it conflicted with the prevailing legal or political framework – and that **force, law, and ethics do not necessarily coincide.**[47]

Authoritarian, totalitarian, and tyrannical power remains morally illegitimate even when codified, as does any power, judicial or otherwise, that recognises nothing above itself.

[47] Like Friedrich Hayek, I wince every time someone invokes "the rule of law" without pausing to consider what that means under immoral laws.

Such a judgement would show that power, lacking any higher standard, becomes its own idol. In that sense, it is power that behaves as the true anarchist – recognising no higher order.[48] I would sooner see myself as a dissident, officially recognised by the court as dangerous enough to be condemned.

Comparative criminal law offers further clarity. In Bulgaria, Germany, Russia, Denmark, and elsewhere, evading military service is not treated as a minor administrative matter. Imprisonment may be imposed for feigning illness, using false documents, fraud, or self-harm. The last of these is particularly telling: **the state punishes a person for damaging his own body because, in this context, that body is already being treated as someone else's property.**[49] You do not need to be a "sovereign citizen" to reject such appropriation. Seen outside the narrow categories of positive law, the conscription system reveals its true nature: **serfdom, even if "only temporary"; codified slavery, in which the individual has no right even over his own flesh.**

I am not among those who would go and enslave themselves simply because they received a call-up order telling them to do so.

As I wrote in *Referendum: Conscription*, if I must choose between compulsory service and prison, I choose prison. The reason is simple. In the first case, I surrender my bodily and inner autonomy out of fear or moral weakness and contribute to my own humiliation. In the second, I retain my inner dignity, while the loss of bodily autonomy is imposed from the outside and the responsibility and moral burden lie with others.

That difference cannot be erased by labels or any number of slogans.

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[48] Here I use "anarchist" in the literal sense suggested by the Greek roots *an-* and *archē:* not as a member of a political movement, but as one who recognises no ruling principle above himself. Power that recognises nothing above itself becomes lawless in the deepest moral sense.

[49] See, for example, Germany's *Strafgesetzbuch* § 109 ("Wehrpflichtentziehung durch Verstümmelung"), Russia's Criminal Code, Article 339 (*членовредительство*), Article 115 of the US Uniform Code of Military Justice ("Malingering"), and Article 383(2) of the Bulgarian Criminal Code.

Chapter 14
"Everyone Does It"

There is a well-known logical fallacy called *argumentum ad populum*, closely related to the *bandwagon fallacy*. The structure is simple: many people, states, or institutions accept, practise, or believe in X; therefore, X must be right; therefore, X must be correct. It does not speak to conscience or offer any moral justification. It relies on inertia and on the mere fact that a practice exists:

"Everyone does it."

"Mobilisation machinery is kept in place across many states, whether currently active or dormant."

"National service is becoming policy – discussed, revived, or normalised across the European Union."

None of these is an argument for the rightness of compulsory military service. They are an appeal to practice – not to what is right, not to ethics, but to an existing state of affairs that you and I are simply expected to inherit.

Let us see what that is supposed to mean.

If something is done widely, it means only this: many states or institutions continue to do it because they have inherited it as a system. It does not mean it is right, genuinely necessary, or ethical.

History offers enough examples.

For centuries, slavery was legal and widespread. States maintained it, regulated it, protected it. It was simply "normal" for its time.

In Europe, across different regimes and periods, people were persecuted, imprisoned, and killed for political or ethnic reasons. That, too, was "normal" within those states.

In Bulgaria, the death penalty existed until the late twentieth century – until, at some point, it was recognised as no longer "normal".

The fact that something is done widely does not make it right. It makes it widespread – perhaps even normalised.

Here is the substitution: "this is common practice" is taken to mean "this is universally acceptable and morally justified". No such logical connection exists.

Even if every state adopted the same measure, it would not make it right. It would only make it common practice – or, more precisely, normalisation by proliferation. Sleepwalkers, too, may live in different places and never know one another, yet still display recognisable common characteristics: they move, react, and appear to act consciously, while lacking full conscious control over their actions. In the same way, a practice may spread across different countries not because it is morally defensible, but because state institutions mechanically repeat familiar patterns inherited from the past or convenient for those in power. This does not exclude conscious agendas and hidden motives, especially among those in power. On the contrary, it is often precisely they who consciously play the role of sleepwalkers, turning institutional automatism into a cover for political strategies.

Their appeal to "normality" usually takes the following form:

"All states need some form of defence."

"Many states have conscription – or are reinstating, expanding, or discussing it."

"So this is simply the normal order of things."

The question is not whether it is done. The existence of the practice is not disputed. The question is whether I have any moral obligation to be part of it.

The fact that others accept something does not mean that I have accepted it. The fact that something is widespread does not mean I am obliged to take part in it.

If "everyone does it" were enough, then any mass practice would be beyond question. That is absurd.

When they point out that "most countries do it, and others may soon follow", the answer is simple: that is not an argument, but a description. Their strategically cropped description hides the fuller picture: 92 countries worldwide do not maintain an active conscription system, compared with 68 that do; 17 of the EU's 27 member states likewise do not maintain one.[50]

So the supporters of involuntary service are in fact relying on a loaded question built on a factual error: neither "all" nor even "most" states, whether globally or across Europe, can be invoked as an argument in their favour. If those facing us in this debate are the people in power, then **we too can ask them loaded questions**, beginning with this one: instead of bringing back conscription slavery, why do we not simply import competent politicians from countries that successfully maintain armies on a voluntary basis?

The question is not rhetorical, just as the following one is not rhetorical either: on what grounds does the practice of a few European states create any obligation whatsoever for me?

I suspect the answers will be slow in coming.

Until then: "widespread" does not mean "ethical", "necessary", or "inevitable". It means only that it is widely practised – or, more precisely, widely imposed by authority. That has never been sufficient, and it never will be.

It is doubtful that compulsory military service is truly accepted by the societies on which it is imposed. The persistent difficulty in attracting enough volunteers – visible in Bulgaria, Germany, the United Kingdom, and at various points in the United States – already suggests why. The reason is clear: current models of military service – whether voluntary or compulsory – are no longer attractive to large parts of the pop-

[50] "Countries with Mandatory Military Service 2026." *World Population Review*, 2026; "Defence: Which European Countries Have Mandatory and Voluntary Military Service?" *Euronews*, 27 April 2026.

ulation, and no slogan can easily make them so. This is not only because of the nature of service within a strictly hierarchical structure, or the suppression of individuality that comes with it. Such environments also allow coercive pressures to spread into other areas of personal autonomy. This was seen, for example, in **military vaccination mandates and related pressures** in 2021–2022, in contexts ranging from Russia[51] and parts of Europe to the United States.[52]

The authoritarian logic is the same: rights, including bodily autonomy, may be withdrawn in the name of a claimed "collective protection" – framed as health protection in one case and military necessity in the other.[53] This is one more reason why reluctance to enter such structures should not be dismissed as mere selfishness or weakness.

Such reluctance does not serve the political narrative. But it shows, once again, how far removed those in power often are from the people they claim to "represent". The chronic recruitment difficulties seen

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[51] "Шойгу заявил о полной вакцинации российской армии от коронавируса" ["Shoigu Announces That the Russian Army Has Been Fully Vaccinated Against Coronavirus"], *Interfax*, 6 August 2021. Shoigu claimed that vaccination by direct order was impossible, but that vaccination was considered "extremely desirable", and asserted that there were no "covid dissidents" or "anti-vaxxers" among either professional or conscript soldiers – a claim that illustrates the familiar authoritarian habit of presenting "soft pressure", conformity, and institutional fear as spontaneous agreement.

[52] "Reinstating Service Members Discharged Under the Military's COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate", The White House, 27 January 2025. The order addressed service members discharged under the US military's COVID-19 vaccination mandate; contemporary reporting put the number of discharged troops at more than 8,000. Such policies also deepen distrust among potential volunteers who object to overreaching mandates.

[53] The recurring comparisons between vaccine mandates and compulsory military service are not some arbitrary conceit of mine. See, for example, Charles Krauthammer, "Smallpox Shots: Make Them Mandatory", *TIME*, 23 December 2002; Paul Delespinasse, "Mandatory Vaccination: More Constitutional Than a Military Draft?", *Newsmax*, 27 July 2021; Dominic A. Rascona, "Coercive Vaccine Mandates for Those Under 25 Resemble a Military Draft", *American Thinker*, 17 August 2021; and Kyle Whitmire, "Vaccine mandates too much? You know we still have a Selective Service, right?", *AL.com*, September 2021.

across a number of NATO armies point to a deeper problem of legitimacy. Bulgaria's low voter turnout already raises serious questions about the political legitimacy of officeholders. But in major states such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, reluctance to serve voluntarily reveals the same gap between "society" and its "representatives" – this time as a question of ethical legitimacy.

If the need for more people to undergo military service and fill the mobilisation reserves were truly as "right", "self-evident", and "essential to the survival of the nation" as claimed, it would not need to be imposed. Enough people would choose it voluntarily – unless one is prepared to argue that most people are suicidal. No – they may simply hold different views, have different priorities, and recognise better solutions than those offered by their power-hungry leaders.

The notion of an abstract "society" that widely supports compulsory national service is a fiction. Even when such a "society" is invoked, it is cherry-picked to exclude those who object, refuse, or would be forced to bear the burden against their will.

The very fact that national service must be explicitly designated as *compulsory* is already clear proof that this supposed social consensus does not exist. If it did, there would be no need for travel restrictions for conscripts, criminal procedures, and threats of severe punishment against those who try by every possible means to escape the obligation imposed upon them. A consensus that must be guarded by confinement and several pages of legal provisions is a bold-faced lie.

* * *

Chapter 15
"It's a Duty"

When defenders of involuntary national service realise that their "rational" narratives lose their moral footing the moment they are used to impose obligations on others, they reach for one of the most familiar ways to shut down the argument:

"It's a duty."

This is not a reasoned argument; it is moral blackmail dressed up as virtue. No debt was freely incurred; nothing was borrowed; nothing is owed. That is why this alleged "duty" is never proven. It cannot be. It is simply proclaimed by people who appoint themselves the final authority over other human beings.

Let us see what that means beyond the slogan.

Some obligations arise clearly:

I sign a contract – I assume an obligation.

I take a loan – I owe repayment.

I make a commitment in good faith – I bear at least a moral responsibility to keep my word.

In all three cases, there is an act on my part that binds me.

Now let us see what is presented as a "duty" in the case of involuntary national service.

I was born in a state. I live in it. I follow certain rules, including many I find acceptable, reasonable, and in some cases even ethical.

From this, the conclusion is drawn: "you owe" – without further proof.

Where is the moment at which I assumed that obligation?

There is no contract. No act by which I accepted it. No choice by which I bound myself. And yet it is claimed that the duty exists.

That is not a duty. It is a supposed obligation assigned to me retroactively. Sometimes this supposed duty is even made to predate my birth, as if I had inherited it from ancestors who never agreed to it either.

There is a second layer.

Even if one accepts that a person may have certain obligations to the society in which they live, that does not specify what those obligations are. It does not follow that this "duty" means military training, military service, or, ultimately, participation in war under mobilisation.

That is not self-evident. It is a choice. A choice made by others.

A choice I did not make is presented as my "duty", overriding my own moral judgement. That is the substitution at work.

If such a duty has not been freely and explicitly assumed, it does not exist – at least not as a moral obligation. To claim otherwise is as logically corrupt as claiming that the home you bought is, in fact, owned by the state. Once it declares an "emergency", the state may seize it and turn it into military quarters or a military hospital, for as long as it deems necessary and on terms you did not freely accept. Absurd? Of course.

A "duty" may exist as a unilateral demand, as a form of extortion; it may be imposed by law, and the law may send its enforcers. But that does not turn it into a duty I am morally obliged to fulfil.

So whenever someone invokes "it's a duty", the questions are simple: who defined this duty? On what grounds? When did I accept it? Is it ethical?

Until there is an answer, this "duty" is not mine. It is a word used to make an imposed demand appear as something more – a word meant to put me on the defensive and force me to justify myself.

Let me put it plainly.

I have no such duty.

This is not an admission that I have overlooked something. Nor is it a claim that "no one told me". I have been told many times. I have rejected it many times.

The issue is not about awareness – it is about compliance or non-compliance.

I reject outright any authoritarian obligation of this kind, which amounts to a modern form of slavery, and I will not comply – whatever the consequences. Full stop.

* * *

Chapter 16
"Human Resources"

Different words. The same outcome.

"Society demands it."
"The common good."
"Everyone must contribute."
"Duty."
"Emergency."
"Security."

All the previous arguments lead to the same place: someone claims the right to decide how you and I are to be used.

That means one thing: the human being is treated as a resource. Not metaphorically. Literally.

If someone can decide where I am required to be on a given day and at a given hour, how my body is to be examined and assessed, where I will be sent, what I will do, and for what purpose I will be used, then I am not the sovereign over myself. The sovereign is the one who decides. I am no longer treated as a person. I am treated as an object – treated as property.

In systems of national service across many states, this logic goes so far that even injury to one's own body may bring investigation and legal consequences if it is seen as obstructing the state's claimed use of that person as a resource.

Then comes the attempt to soften it: institutions speak of "human resources" and "personnel". Political theory may even speak of abstract "bodies". The management of "human capital" is not merely corporate language: in the context of mobilisation and compulsory service

in peacetime, it describes exactly what is happening: the allocation of human beings as resources, much like inanimate objects.

The language changes to make it more acceptable. The substance does not.

When the state claims the power to mobilise you – whether for combat or for other forms of compulsory service – it is claiming a right over your body. It strips the person of freedom of movement and choice. Above all, it strips away personal autonomy and free will – or, in religious terms, the freedom of the soul.

The claim is not only over your time. Not only over your labour. It is over you as a whole – including that inner core of the person that religious language calls the soul, and secular language calls consciousness, personality, or inner sovereignty. The names differ. The meaning is essentially the same: as long as a person is alive, the body cannot be regarded as a separate entity without affecting the inner core – personal consciousness and will. Only death can sever the inner self from the flesh.

If someone seeks to control not just your time or attention, but claims that you as a whole are theirs to dispose of, that is ownership in substance. There is no exaggeration in saying so.

A state of exception, whether openly military or merely militarised in its logic, is always presented as temporary. Yet rights and freedoms may be suspended more broadly and for longer than anything experienced during the COVID-19 restrictions. What begins as "just a few days" can stretch into years. In practice, it can become an open-ended system of near-total control – nominally temporary, effectively indefinite.[54]

This is the point of collision.

On one side stands the idea that a person owns themselves. On the

[54] A typical example is provided by Russian and Ukrainian reservists mobilised for the war, who have been separated from their families for an "indefinite" period. See "Russian Soldiers' Wives Want Their Men Back, Posting a Rare Challenge to Putin and His War in Ukraine", *NBC News*, 20 January 2024; "Ukraine War: 'If We Go Home, a Lot of Inexperienced Soldiers Will Die'", *BBC News*, 6 May 2024.

other stands the idea that they may be used for purposes they did not choose. There is no middle ground between these positions. The notion of "compensation", financial or otherwise, is also defined unilaterally by the same side. It cannot compensate anyone for whom autonomy of conscience and bodily integrity are non-negotiable.[55]

All the arguments we have examined are attempts to avoid stating this directly. To avoid saying: "we have voted ourselves powers over you, including the power to dispose of you."

Instead, it is framed as "duty", "common good", "security", "emergency". Different words. The same meaning.

So there is no need for further detours. The question is direct: on what grounds does anyone imagine they can treat a human being as a resource – in roles they did not choose, for causes they have not agreed to serve? Once the question takes this form, the premise has already collapsed.

No answer built on that premise can bind me. Whatever it is, I do not accept it and will not honour it.

Professional soldiers, corporate employees, and many other people may, with commitment and even passion, choose to take on roles in which they accept, to some extent, being treated as resources within a given system. That is not the issue here. The issue is on what grounds a human being may be turned into a resource against their will, by law and coercion. Everything built on that premise remains a claim, not a foundation grounded in reasons that can bind those who reject it.

Claims of de facto ownership over human beings do not become binding simply because they exist. They can bind only those who recognise them for themselves – those willing to be treated as resources to be disposed of.

Such claims have never been recognised by me – and they never will be.

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[55] See Chapter 26 for a fuller analysis of the legal concept of "compensation" as it applies to involuntary service.

Chapter 17
The Recruitment Crisis and What It Conceals

"There are not enough volunteers". That is another refrain you hear from those in power.

It is not difficult to guess the reasons why some of them advocate conscription: the consolidation and expansion of a new political order in which the state once again claims direct authority over the bodies, time, and obedience of its citizens. In another sense, however, they are being honest: they are simply unable to make military service attractive to enough people, especially among younger generations. The same pattern appears at both the national level and the level of international policy: the same problem, met with the same one-sided "solution" imposed from above.

"If you won't do it willingly, you'll do it anyway."

Dobrozorno, as the Bulgarian word has it: something done "voluntarily" only because coercion stands behind it.

Brazen.

It does not become any less brazen when we are told that in countries such as Finland, for historical or other reasons, compulsory military service is supposedly not even seen as a burden, even among the young. **If that is the case, then why is it compulsory at all?** I have heard similar claims about Greece, and I find them even harder to take seriously. A significant share of my fellow students at university were Greek men studying in Bulgaria precisely to avoid conscription. This is not speculation – they said it openly. The same can be said of Turkish conscripts, some of whom go even further abroad to avoid being drafted – or, in the language of the state, to become "draft evaders".

Yet those in power, who seek to expand that power through national service, would have us believe that the problem lies with us – never with them.

There are several problems with this line of thinking.

Where "national service" is being introduced, the authorities are effectively shifting onto the population a systemic problem for which they themselves are responsible. In such cases, even high voter turnout does not necessarily translate into willingness to serve or support for military solutions. It is not hard to conclude that many have little desire to serve such authorities. The resulting personnel shortages speak for themselves.

There is an ethical dimension to this: coercion does not solve a systemic problem.

But there is also a straightforward logical flaw: compulsory military training does nothing to resolve the shortage of professional personnel within the armed forces. Nor does it solve the related problem faced by other countries: an ageing professional force that is not being renewed fast enough.[56] It could do so only if conscripts were kept mobilised indefinitely and pushed into professional and even officer roles. That is absurd.

Even more absurd is the maintenance of a conscript reserve for questionable institutional reasons. One of them is the need for a standing pool of soldiers and reservists to be placed under command, thereby justifying the retention of officer and general posts, especially in states such as Russia.[57]

A similar logic, this time combined with the threat of invasion from

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[56] "Jahresbericht der Wehrbeauftragten beraten", *Deutscher Bundestag*, 21 May 2025; "Répartition des effectifs militaires et civils par sexe et âge, en 2024", *data.gouv.fr*, 3 October 2025; "UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics: April 2024", *GOV.UK*, 11 July 2024; "Personeelsrapportage midden 2022", Ministerie van Defensie, 2022.

[57] "Реформа, прерванная на полпути" ["A Reform Interrupted Halfway Through"], Otechestvennye zapiski, no. 3 (60), 2014, strana-oz.ru.

that very same Russia, underlies the pressure to restore conscription in Europe: to build a mobilisation reserve – a pool of nominally trained "soldiers", given just enough time for the state to claim that they have been trained. So they can later be used in military operations – or "defence", since that sounds better. Or simply because compulsory "national service" – whether military or civilian – trains people in obedience and conditions them for life under an authoritarian world order.

This reveals several things.

The authorities are politically impotent[58] when it comes to solving a chronic problem, assuming they are even trying. The only measure they reach for – especially in Bulgaria, but from what I have observed, across other European countries as well – is raising salaries. Real reforms that would make military service genuinely attractive[59] are nowhere in sight in the European Union. Not so much as a hint of them. The Swedish model of compulsory national service, often held up as a benchmark, is not a reform in my eyes. It is a regression towards something repellent, albeit with palliative elements. If I choose to be generous, I can acknowledge some mitigating circumstances in Sweden's case, though none of them apply automatically to Bulgaria or to any other European country.

In some countries, such as Germany, a whole series of controversial "reforms" were carried out. They not only failed to produce the promised increase in attractiveness; in several respects, they appeared to have the opposite effect. It is worth noting who oversaw those reforms: Ursula von der Leyen, then serving as defence minister.[60] At that time, her agenda was framed around volunteer recruitment and "fami-

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[58] I use the word descriptively. If I were in their position, I could not persuade a clear-eyed person to undertake military service once they had seen wars for what they are: young fools fighting the wars of old crooks.

[59] For military service to become more appealing to a larger share of people today, the entire military hierarchy would have to be rethought and reshaped. This is unlikely to happen within a unitary state built on the same hierarchical and, at times, no less authoritarian model. More on this in the Afterword.

[60] "German SPD lists von der Leyen failures in damning paper to EU peers", *Reuters*, 11 July 2019; "The scandal hanging over Ursula von der Leyen", *Politico*, 6 September 2019; "Von der Leyen admits 'mistakes' in contracting scandal but stands her ground", *Politico*, 13 February 2020.

ly-friendly" military reform. [61]

In her role as President of the European Commission, her rhetoric and policy direction have moved towards open militarisation. Critics have also pointed to the familiar asymmetry of such politics: those who speak most readily about war are rarely the ones whose own children are first expected to bear its burden. What follows from this shift is the normalisation of escalation: other people's children are expected to bear the risk of a war that could still be avoided. And this is presented as necessity, even though it appears to serve a very specific political purpose: placing young and healthy men under command, removing them from independent social action, and making them available to a new, openly authoritarian order.

Meanwhile, the cost of these "reforms" has long been covered by taxpayers – and will continue to be borne, at an even higher price, both physical and mental, by those who comply with compulsory national service. Perhaps there will be plenty of them. Most will persuade themselves that they are doing it out of patriotism, or because "there is no other choice". One simple question hardly needs asking: if they are such patriots, if they feel drawn to military service, why did they wait until it became compulsory again? The barracks were always there – their doors open, the requirements steadily lowered.

Yet interest remained limited. Very few people were willing to put themselves through that – especially for the long term.

There is a deeper point here – one that is rarely said out loud. Modern wars are not won by barely trained infantry alone. It took decades of messaging to sell the idea that "everyone must serve", supposedly because it is "the foundation of defence". Yet military strategists themselves have been working from a very different playbook for a long time.

Modern warfare is shaped by high-tech capabilities: long-range strike systems, drones, signals intelligence, cyber operations, and logistics. These domains require skilled professionals, not unwilling conscripts

[61] "German defence minister von der Leyen seeks to make Bundeswehr more family-friendly", *Deutsche Welle*, 12 January 2014; "Interview with German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen", *Der Spiegel*, 27 January 2014; "German army 'could recruit EU citizens'", *BBC News*, 27 December 2018.

pulled in from anywhere the state can find bodies, including prisons. In both Russia[62] and Ukraine,[63] authorities have recruited prisoners under different legal and institutional arrangements – a sign of how severe manpower shortages are being managed through coercive or semi-coercive substitutes rather than addressed at their root.

Even the strictly military case for "filling the reserve" is far weaker than its advocates suggest. It is a relic of twentieth-century thinking, repurposed in the twenty-first for something else. Not because there is any real military need for mass mobilisation, but because there is a political need for a tool of population control.

The point becomes chillingly clear when the demand comes not from the army alone, but from the mass-surveillance and defence-technology sector. In 2026, Palantir urged that "national service should be a universal duty"[64] and that society should consider moving away from an all-volunteer force.

This is not merely a call for manpower; it is a blueprint for civic subordination.

It was a call for a new civic order in which the population is made available to the state, to war planners, and to the companies that build the technological systems of future conflict. Nor is this merely an American question.

Palantir's military AI systems are already being integrated into NATO

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[62] "Putin backs push for mercenary groups to sign contracts despite Wagner's refusal", *Reuters*, 13 June 2023.

[63] "Ukraine lawmakers back bill allowing some convicts to enlist in army", *Reuters,* 8 May 2024; "Thousands of Ukrainian prisoners apply to join army in return for parole", *Reuters,* 31 May 2024. The latter also notes that Russia's Defence Ministry continued recruiting convicts from prisons for its Storm-Z formations.

[64] "US Draft Update: Palantir Urges Universal National Service", *Newsweek*, 19 April 2026, updated 20 April 2026. The article reports Palantir's statement that "National service should be a universal duty" and that the United States should consider moving away from an all-volunteer force; it also notes the simultaneous move towards automatic Selective Service registration through federal data sources.

and European defence structures.[65] Its call for universal national service therefore cannot be treated as a purely domestic American proposal. The recruitment crisis is only the surface. Beneath it lies something much larger: the attempt to place citizens – their bodies, skills, data, and obedience – at the disposal of a permanent war-and-security machine.

That is why the abstract language of "reserves" should not be taken at face value. A reserve does not solve the shortage of professionals. It serves a different purpose. It is a mechanism for keeping people mobilisable – and therefore controllable. Once established, it can be used not only for "defence", but for any policy labelled as "defence". This appears to be its function.

For tyrannical power, the population itself is a potential threat – especially healthy men of military age. That threat is neutralised once those same people are placed in a subordinate role and trained to defend the regime instead of themselves and their families.

This is hardly a hidden truth. Declassified material has been surfacing for decades. Conscription has always served broader political purposes that go well beyond simply filling the ranks.

A few examples help illustrate this:

A declassified CIA memorandum on **Soviet** conscription describes annual call-ups not only into the regular armed forces, but also into "militarized security forces". It notes that recruitment quotas were shaped in part by individuals' "political status", indicating that conscription could serve political as well as military purposes. The memorandum further observes that induction and discharge cycles provided a convenient way to adjust force size with relative secrecy, allowing the state to expand or reduce personnel without attracting public attention.[66]

Without going into unnecessary detail, it is worth noting that con-

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[65] See, for example, NATO Communications and Information Agency, "NATO acquires AI-enabled warfighting system", *news release*, 14 April 2025; UK Ministry of Defence, "New strategic partnership to unlock billions and boost military AI and innovation", *GOV.UK*, 18 September 2025.

[66] Central Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Conscription", declassified memorandum, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP64B00346R000100130032-6.pdf

scription in the Soviet Union also functioned, in part, as an instrument of population redistribution and Russification, facilitating the integration and cultural assimilation of diverse populations across regions from the Baltic to the Far East.[67] Although it was not part of the USSR, Bulgaria was similarly affected: for an extended period, the military oath included involuntary readiness to serve a foreign power to which the "people's" army was subordinate in almost every respect. This reflects the same underlying use of conscription as a tool of social conditioning discussed in the Danish case, where it was framed as making migrants come to like the local population and adopt its norms.

A contemporary example of a similar political logic appeared in **Belarus** in 2020, where student protesters were expelled and publicly threatened with being sent "to the army or to the streets".[68] In later years, the same pattern continued: former political prisoners who had been forcibly expelled from Belarus reportedly received draft notices[69] ordering them to return for military re-registration, with warnings of administrative liability for non-appearance. Belarus is not an exotic exception. It is a clear example of the same mechanism: conscription can be used not as neutral defence policy, but as a coercive instrument for dealing with dissidents and political opponents.

In the **U.S.** wartime case, conscription was explicitly integrated into broader state control over the allocation of civilian labour. *Executive Order 9279* transferred the Selective Service System to the War Manpower Commission, a body responsible for coordinating manpower across the armed forces, industry, and agriculture.[70] This institutional shift meant

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[67] Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Soviet Army as the Instrument of National Integration", in John Erickson and E. J. Feuchtwanger, eds, Soviet Military Power and Performance, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1979, pp. 129–154.

[68] "Belarusian students complain of expulsions after joining opposition strike", *Reuters*, 28 October 2020.

[69] "Viasna: Former Political Prisoners Expelled From Belarus Receive Draft Notices", *Reform.news*, 14 March 2026.

[70] "Executive Order 9279: Providing for the Most Effective Mobilization and Utilization of the National Manpower and Transferring the Selective Service System to the War Manpower Commission", *The American Presidency Project*, 5 December 1942.

that the draft was no longer driven solely by military demand. Instead, it became part of a centralised system for directing individuals into roles deemed most necessary for the war effort, whether in uniform or in civilian production. The draft thus operated as part of a wider system of labour control, ensuring that manpower was distributed according to state priorities rather than individual choice.

In this sense, too, conscription can be understood as a form of involuntary servitude, in which the state directs individuals between military and economic functions or requires them to serve in both simultaneously.

In contemporary **Norway**, conscript training has reportedly included coercive mixed-gender "field hygiene" practices. Conscripts have described being required to bathe nude in mixed-gender settings under command, while complaints led to little or no policy change.[71] Even media coverage failed to bring about the abandonment of practices justified as promoting cohesion among recruits. In this model, conscription is not only about military staffing; it is also used as an instrument of ideological conditioning.

Recruits are placed in tightly controlled institutional settings where compliance is enforced through imposed social practices and normative framing. In the Norwegian case, this includes a form of imposed sexual neutralisation ("degenderisation"), justified by the state. In practice, this means the forced removal of ordinary boundaries of personal space between the sexes. It is accompanied by compulsory adaptation to military norms, presented as a civic virtue.

Enforced exposure and compulsory mixed-gender arrangements do not merely create tension between officers and conscripts; they can

[71] *Forces News*, "Norway Has No Plans To Change Nude Bathing Policy", 22 January 2016; *The Local/AFP*, "Tanks, guns and bras: Norway's women join the draft", 25 August 2016. Forces News reported a case in which a female soldier said she had been made to bathe nude alongside male soldiers, described feeling abused, and stated that she cried and felt sick afterwards; the Norwegian military later confirmed that it had no plans to change its bathing policy. The Local/AFP reports mixed rooms, examples of women sharing rooms with men, and complaints of inappropriate comments or behaviour in the context of Norway's gender-neutral conscription.

also create tension among conscripts themselves. For example, men and women may be required to sleep in shared quarters, with personal privacy overridden by command.[72]

These dynamics are not incidental. They contribute to an environment in which harassment among soldiers persists at notable levels, including in Western countries such as Norway. Such patterns of coercion, humiliation, and institutionalised abuse are usually associated with practices like *dedovshchina* in the Soviet and Russian military. But the underlying mechanism is not confined to those systems.

In Bulgaria, such cases receive no media coverage, and the reason is not hard to guess: at a time of severe personnel shortages in the professional army, publicising cases heard by the country's military courts and involving physical and sexual assaults between cadets, psychological harassment, or beatings of subordinates by officers, would hardly serve the cause of recruiting volunteers. Several such cases, as well as others involving particularly high risks to society, were described in Appendix 1 of *Referendum: Conscription*.[73] There I also raised a question that deserves renewed attention: can anyone guarantee, and by what means, that such "disciplined" military personnel, who got away with administrative penalties or symbolic sentences, will not become the "educators" of the young if compulsory training is introduced in educational institutions or if compulsory national service is imposed?

The United States is an especially revealing example precisely because the problem of unacceptable relations between service members is well documented in official language. A Government Accountability Office report on military hazing found serious deficiencies in data reporting, training, oversight, and personnel capacity, while also noting that reported complaints probably captured only part of the real

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[72] Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, *Bullying and Sexual Harassment in the Norwegian Armed Forces – Results from the MOST Survey 2020*.

[73] *Referendum: Conscription* ("Референдум: Казарма") can be downloaded free of charge in PDF format from otizvora.com/referendum-kazarma/is-referendum-kazarma.pdf. The book is available only in Bulgarian, but international readers can translate it themselves or use artificial intelligence to familiarise themselves with its contents in summary form.

scale of the problem. Pentagon reporting on sexual assault, and later inspector-general reviews of the Army's response to harassment, point in the same direction: tightly controlled military environments create conditions in which abuses are difficult to prevent, measure, report, and police.[74]

The same pattern appears elsewhere. In the United Kingdom, the Deepcut Review documented bullying, a sexualised environment, and institutional failures in the training of young soldiers.[75] In France, legal commentary on *bizutage* and later journalistic investigations into elite and deployed units describe humiliation, physical violence, verbal degradation, sleep deprivation, and moral harassment.[76] In Germany, the Pfullendorf scandal exposed dehumanising hazing rituals at the Staufer military training centre, including soldiers being tied to chairs and doused with cold water, the filming of naked servicemembers without their consent, and sexualised abuses during military training, including forced stripping, inappropriate physical contact during mock medical examinations, and sodomy.[77]

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[74] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Hazing: DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls*, GAO-22-104066, 15 December 2021; U.S. Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, *Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, cited series, including FY 2024 report; U.S. Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General, *Review of the Army's Efforts to Prevent and Respond to Harassment of Soldiers*, DODIG-2024-074, 17 April 2024.

[75] Nicholas Blake QC, *The Deepcut Review: A Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Deaths of Four Soldiers at Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut between 1995 and 2002*, HC 795, London: The Stationery Office, 2006.

[76] Nicolas Bara, "Dossier : Bizutage dans l'armée", *Droit des militaires*, 8 January 2012; "Former paratroopers accuse French officers of violent hazing and racism", *RFI*, 16 May 2025; "Brimades, humiliation... D'ex-soldats français à Djibouti témoignent", *Marianne*, 20 April 2026.

[77] "Bundeswehr-Skandal in Pfullendorf: 'Völlig unsoldatisches Verhalten'", *Deutschlandfunk*, 28 January 2017; "Prozess wegen Bundeswehrritualen: Stiefelsack für den Täufling", *die tageszeitung*, 19 July 2017; "Gericht erklärt Entlassung von Pfullendorf-Soldaten für rechtens", Deutscher BundeswehrVerband, 9 February 2018.

The details may vary from country to country, but the lesson is the same: once young people are placed under command in a confined, hierarchical environment, abuse is not some accidental feature of that environment. It is a self-reproducing and recurring risk inherent in the very structure.

This is why blanket claims that involuntary military service can somehow avoid phenomena such as those described – including the suicides of young people following the violence they have endured, beginning with the very coercion into such service – are not credible. They are not supported by psychology, and they are not supported by practice.[78] Forced participation in a tightly controlled institution creates dependency, fear, conformity, status games, and opportunities for domination. Whether the uniform is Russian, American, British, French, German, Norwegian, or Bulgarian, the mechanism is recognisable. The harsher forms may differ, but the underlying logic remains: take young people, isolate them, rank them, discipline them, and teach them that obedience matters more than personal dignity.

Any society that puts its young people through enforced institutional discipline – even if it is framed as "short-term" and "mild" – comes out of it changed. It builds habits of obedience, conditions reflexes of hierarchy, and normalises the idea that an external authority can lay claim to a person's time, labour, body, and consciousness. At that point, it is less about military training and more about conditioning: suppressing individual will, training people to follow orders even when they are degrading or meaningless, and teaching them that refusal brings consequences.

Who stands to benefit?

The reshaping of the world order over the past decade has been mov-

[78] See, for example, Bethmann and Cho, "Conscription hurts", SSM – *Population Health*, 2023; Mieziene et al., "Health Behaviors and Psychological Distress Among Conscripts of the Lithuanian Military Service", *IJERPH*, 2020; Sağlam, "Early maladaptive schemas, coping strategies, and functional impairments... during compulsory military service", *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 2025; Maya Eichler, "Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia", *Stanford University Press*, 2011.

ing toward more authoritarian forms of governance, regardless of the labels under which they are presented. Many states still described as "liberal democracies" have gradually begun adopting tools once associated mainly with authoritarian regimes such as China and Russia – mass surveillance, digital control, automated sanctions, restrictions imposed without ordinary judicial process, and exclusion from banking or information systems for inconvenient citizens.

The reinstatement of conscription in some European countries and the push to introduce universal national service – across the continent and beyond – are part of the same package. They are not a response to a military threat, because nominally trained, unwilling soldiers cannot stop drones or ballistic missiles. Wars today are not fought, let alone won, with bayonets in trenches.

What we are dealing with is a tool for restructuring the relationship between the state and the individual. The state is reclaiming "powers" that for a time seemed abandoned. Even forgotten.

The beneficiaries are those who gain a broader set of tools for managing the population. External interests benefit as well – interests that require a European population kept under control, ordered into obedient ranks. A population that can be sent wherever and whenever needed – and kept quiet and compliant at home in times of peace.

This is not a conspiracy theory. It is a reading of stated priorities – those of global forums such as the World Economic Forum, transnational governance bodies, EU security strategies, defence frameworks, and "whole-of-society resilience" doctrines.

Their own documents spell it out: the EU's Strategic Compass (2022),[79] the Readiness 2030 package,[80] the NATO Parliamentary Assem-

[79] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, approved 21 March 2022.

[80] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030*, 19 March 2025.

bly's annual reports on "whole-of-society resilience".[81] Read them. The language leaves little room for doubt.

The laws they pass also point to what comes next.

As early as 2020, it was not difficult to foresee that, with such management of the COVID crisis, increasingly invasive public health measures would follow from 2021 onwards. The pattern was already clearly visible: there was talk of a state of emergency, centralised governance under a single chain of command, the normalisation of restrictions, and the circumvention of ordinary medical practices.

It is equally readable now: the topic of "universal national service" will at some point become a matter of intense public debate across the entire European Union – and beyond it. Everything points in that direction. The water is being heated one deliberate degree at a time.

In my view, one thing does create a sense of obligation: the sheer arrogance of unchecked power. That self-appointed posture – authorities presuming they can "solve" problems often of their own making – is enough to provoke discontent or outright anger.

That is reason enough for me to say no – and to do everything I can to encourage others to do the same. Let the mobilisation reserve be made up, first of all, of those who actively support these authorities and sustain their system, including through electoral participation. If they continue to support the warmongers they vote for, then their loyalty should be genuine. They may be the ones sent to die for it.

I do not share that loyalty. The very thought of becoming a slave, an ordinary pawn, to such warmongers disgusts me.

It frightens me.

More than death.

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[81] NATO Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 466: Developing a Whole-of-Society, Integrated and Coordinated Approach to Resilience for Allied Democracies*, adopted 11 October 2021.

Chapter 18

The Machinery of Repression and the Cost of Refusal

I share the view that a person has an inherent right to refuse military or civilian service at any time – even after they have already begun to serve. As discussed in a previous chapter, this view is codified and conditionally applied only in Norway. Other states require conscientious objection to "compulsory" military service to be declared within a short period. Often it must follow a state-approved template that does not allow refusal of alternative civilian service as well.

But conscientious objection is not restricted only by the narrow time window in which it may be declared. It is also besieged by countless small "obligations" connected with conscription procedures that precede the great "obligation" to serve. Usually, they occupy around two years in the life of anyone the state has unilaterally declared to be its debtor. For people studying at university, or periodically deferred for health or social reasons, this can mean many more years of assorted "obligations", imposed with or without prior notice.

A more detailed account of the historical Bulgarian context is given in *Referendum: Barracks*, but the "obligations" described there do not differ substantially from those in other states with involuntary service. The book proposes both universal and perhaps controversial methods for non-participation in certain "compulsory" procedures without incurring sanctions. It also offers solutions for highly personalised and more acceptable participation in others.

For readers who are about to encounter the conscription machine

in their own country, and are not afraid that this encounter may sometimes be head-on, my personal and unusual experience, shared in the previous book on the subject, may be useful. Although these details are not unimportant for the present chapter as well, here I place the emphasis elsewhere and prefer to set out mainly new considerations: what can and cannot be expected from the state and from the social environment when someone is irritated by our putting "obligations" in quotation marks.

It begins with "preventive" procedures: notices, deadlines, summonses for military registration, questionnaires, compulsory medical examinations, chest X-rays, tuberculin skin tests (Mantoux) and, depending on the result and on one's readiness to submit, vaccination in formation as well. This is not merely administrative harassment. It is the conscription system taking hold before service has even begun: social engineering in white coats, with blood-sucking syringes in hand – even for conscripts who will never reach actual military service for health or other reasons.

When military service is compulsory, the entire state becomes one vast military zone where everyone serves: conscripts, parents, wives and children, employers, teachers and professors. "We are all in this together", because taxes pay for it, whether we approve of it or not, and whether or not we delude ourselves that the conscription system does not affect us personally. Everyone pays for it; only the moral bill differs, according to our individual conscience and our attitude towards state violations of inherent human rights.

The state machinery processes both those who will serve in the army and those who have been "exempted". The message is clear: *your body, and everything in you beyond the flesh, already belongs to us; our power has no meaning unless it is exercised.*

For the state and its army, you are above all material subject to periodic "compulsory" inventories; only after that are you anything else. You may have become a student, distinguished yourself in your profession, even become a husband and father – it does not matter,

because first of all you are a conscript, that is, supposedly "obliged" to someone for something. Every year you are required to provide the military district office with a "certificate" in order to preserve your student rights – after the conscription "obligations" have first been partially satisfied.

Ignore any "obligation", and the reminders begin: first, second, third, each one with fewer hints and ever more openly worded threats.

Then come the penalties: final warnings spelling out fines and criminal liability, the fines themselves, restricted access to services.

After that come the heavier measures: frozen assets, blocked accounts, and limits on work, travel, and education.

It can go as far as court cases and imprisonment – "deprivation of liberty", as they call it – as if that line had not already been crossed the moment "national service" is compulsory and lays claim to a broad range of your inalienable freedoms, despite your refusal to surrender them.

Running alongside all this is the media pressure. One does not expect originality from routine mouthpieces, so the script is predictable. Those who refuse compulsory service will be labelled "cowards", "selfish", "irresponsible", "a threat to society".

The aim is for the shaming campaign to become a weapon for securing compliance: to isolate you, to pressure you, until you compel yourself to yield. Every day, familiar faces will appear in the media, eager to produce loud headlines and clever ideas for punishing anyone who refuses to conform.

This is not new. In Britain during the First World War, women handed out white feathers to men in civilian clothes – a public mark of cowardice. The state did not need to act directly. It created the conditions and watched from the sidelines.

We have seen the same pattern more recently, directed against the so-called "anti-vaxxers", a label applied indiscriminately to very different people. Some of the most vocal among them were not random members of the public – they were medical professionals, including some with extensive backgrounds in immunology. They were not misled by ignorance or "Russian propaganda". They had substantive reasons to consider mRNA technology insufficiently tested, and to regard the

products based on it as far from "100% safe and effective". None of that protected them from state pressure reinforced by media pressure – or from being quarantined like viruses and shut out of public discourse altogether.

With national service, it could be worse. New digital tools make coercion faster, more precise, harder to escape. We need not stimulate their appetite for harm; the tools are already operational.

Social pressure will be just as strong. You know how it works. You have seen it.

People can be remarkably shrewd when skirting illogical pandemic measures – especially when they know they will get away with it – and yet consistently disappointing when their own comfort is affected. When swabs are inserted into their children's noses and throats for "tests", they accept it. Not because they believe in the diagnostic value of those repeated procedures, but because the alternative is inconvenience – denied access to school, restrictions, pressure. And that is enough to make them give in.

If something like that can be swallowed when it temporarily violates their children's bodily autonomy, what happens when those same children are effectively claimed for "national service", with penalties for refusal? I do not know. Perhaps we are about to find out. It will also be interesting to see how some of them – especially in certain Balkan countries, though not exclusively – reconcile their professed attachment to Russia with training their children for a war against that very same Russia.

Cognitive dissonance – the convenient habit of smoothing over irreconcilable contradictions – ceased to surprise me long ago. I have come to accept that, in large parts of "society", critical thinking is in even shorter supply than personnel in the army.

The other loud camp in "society" will not surprise me either. They are just as predictable – the same behavioural patterns we saw during

the pandemic will be applied to national service. Once something is framed as a fight against Russia, it becomes acceptable to them. It will not matter that, until recently, their own leaders – in Bulgaria, for example – were arguing against proposals to reinstate conscription, insisting that coercion was not the way and that there were other means of attracting people.[82] Even now, many of them are adopting the hate speech that the Ukrainian authorities use against men trying to avoid mobilisation. It is not difficult for me to imagine that, if compulsory military service is restored here as well under the formal explanation of defence against Russia, the same hate speech will quickly be directed at Bulgarian conscientious objectors, at Russophiles, or at anyone who defends themselves rather than them. And the loudest accusers themselves, I am convinced, will long since have found a way to be removed from the mobilisation reserve, or at least to end up far from the top of the call-up roster.

Social pressure, however, should not be seen as the main challenge. What matters is knowing that one is not alone. There are many people like me who do not accept the full ideological package of either camp. That means a person can build their own network of support under this kind of pressure.

When it comes to sanctions and repression, physical force is not an exception. It is the final tool. Home checks, street stops, detentions, forced transport, compulsory mobilisation. That is what it looks like when a system is pushed to its limit – assuming such a limit exists.

We can see how this works in "busification", the forcible rounding up of **Ukrainian** men of military age into vans under conditions of an indefinite state of emergency. We see it in conscription sweeps in metro stations in large **Russian** cities, where students with lawful deferments and ordinary men who simply look to be of military age are stopped

[82] "Христо Иванов: Няма нужда от нова Конституция, ще набутат в нея недообмислени дивотии (Видео)" ["Hristo Ivanov: There Is No Need for a New Constitution – They Will Stuff Ill-Considered Absurdities into It (Video)"], *Debati.bg*, 17 August 2020. Ivanov cites conscription among damaging "Patriotic Front" add-ons to the proposed new constitution.

and forcibly transported to military assembly points.[83] And we see it in raids on migrant dormitories, workplaces, and public spaces, where men from Central Asian states – including newly naturalised Russian citizens who had moved to Russia for work – are taken to military offices for registration, processing, classification, and eventual use as military manpower.[84]

It is not necessary, however, to look only at the extreme wartime forms of this violence. The same logic operates in peacetime as well – even in countries such as **Sweden**, which is held up across Europe as a model conscription system. This "modern", "moderate" and "civilised" system is especially revealing precisely because it is rarely associated with the kind of repression that travels around the world under grim headlines. But when refusal to take part in a unilaterally imposed obligation is translated into the language of law, the soft administrative surface quickly proves to be only the first layer – powder over coercion.

The Swedish system treats failure to appear for conscription procedures and refusal to undergo military training as a violation of *totalförsvarsplikt* – the duty of total defence.[85] The law itself defines total

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[83] "В Москве идут облавы на призывников. Как их ловят по камерам наблюдения, как защититься от полиции и что делать на сборном пункте" ["Draft Roundups in Moscow: How They Are Tracked Through Surveillance Cameras, How to Protect Yourself from Police, and What to Do at the Assembly Point"], *Nastoyashcheye Vremya / Current Time*, 22 October 2025. See also The Moscow Times, "Moscow Using Facial Recognition to Detain Men Challenging Military Drafts, Rights Group Says", 20 October 2025. Rights groups have repeatedly reported such detentions, including cases involving men with deferments, medical exemptions, or pending legal challenges. Lawyers also report that men taken to assembly points are pressured into signing contracts that would make them eligible for front-line deployment in Ukraine.

[84] "Moscow Police Reportedly Force Migrant Workers To Enlist Amid Raids", *RFE/RL*, 18 April 2024; "More than 350 newly naturalized Russian citizens reportedly sent to army after police raid workplaces", *Meduza*, 7 December 2023; "Russian Conscripts in Primorye Coerced Into Contracts to Fight in Ukraine", *UNITED24 Media*, 22 January 2026.

[85] Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, "Total defence duty", *Krisinformation.se*, 6 March 2025.

defence as the responsibility of the entire population, and the obligation covers Swedish citizens from the year in which they turn 16 until the end of the year in which they turn 70. Under certain conditions, it even applies to foreign citizens living in the country.

The penalties are not symbolic. Refusal to perform military or civilian service can lead to a prison sentence of up to one year, and in a state of heightened mobilisation readiness – from six months to four years. Failure to appear for *mönstring* – examination by a military medical board – is initially punished with a fine.[86] The law also allows a person to be brought in by the police, at their own expense, if they fail to appear without a reason that the authorities recognise as valid. It is especially interesting that a person must pay for being forcibly brought in by a police force they already support through their taxes. Even the USSR did not reach such accounting elegance, although there it was not unheard of for relatives to pay for the bullet used to kill the state's "enemy" of collectivism.

Almost immediately after the restoration of conscription in Sweden, the first custodial sentences were announced for failure to report for service or for leaving after service had begun.[87] In the same period, it became clear that in Östergötland alone, since 2018, ten people had been convicted of violations of the duty of total defence.[88] In 2023, a man from Tranås was also sentenced to prison for failing to appear for compulsory military training after the state rejected his request for deferment.[89] In 2026, a man around 60 years old in West Värmland received 14 days in prison for failing to appear for ten days of repeat training, citing health reasons.[90]

Sweden is not the crudest case. That is precisely why it is so reveal-

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[86] Lag (1994:1809) om totalförsvarsplikt, *Sveriges riksdag*.

[87] "Sweden hands out first jail terms for draft evasion since return of conscription", *The Local*, 4 April 2019.

[88] Sveriges Radio P4 Östergötland, "Struntade i lumpen och åtalades – så många har dömts i Östergötland", *Sveriges Radio*, 22 May 2023.

[89] Sveriges Radio P4 Jönköping, "Uteblev från värnplikten – döms till fängelse", *Sveriges Radio*, 5 May 2023.

[90] Sveriges Radio P4 Värmland, "Struntade i repövning – döms till fängelse", *Sveriges Radio*, 2 February 2026.

ing. The country shows that even a selective, modern, supposedly soft and liberal conscription system remains violence against individuals whose only "crime" is their refusal to submit to the very same morally criminal system. While a person obeys, everything seems in order. When they refuse, the civilised mask drops and the vocabulary changes: violation, fine, being forcibly brought in by the police, court proceedings, prison time. From that point on, the question is no longer whether the system uses repression, but only how long it can continue to present it as normal state procedure in the name of the "common good" – a good that excludes everyone who does not find it obvious.

There is no need to look that far. We have seen it ourselves, not that long ago. Until about twenty years ago, when conscription was still in place here in **Bulgaria**, people – and even their personal property – were reduced to entries on a military register. Bribes for exemptions or better assignments were an open secret – an unofficial but widely understood price list familiar to anyone who dealt with the draft offices and military hospitals at the time.

When private property – cars and off-road vehicles – was placed on a register of assets available for military use, there were many cases in which senior officers used those vehicles for personal purposes, while their legal owners were denied the right to use them. This is the literal transformation of people – and their property – into resources for someone else's use.

There was no shortage of documented cases from that period. There was a shortage of consequences. What none of us have seen is anyone actually held accountable – not symbolically, not as media theatre, but through real convictions and ruined careers.

That is the historical baseline we start from.

And when institutions are brought back after a long interruption, they rarely return in a cleaner form. More often, they carry over their old habits, extend them with new tools, and take root again.

It is naive to think that the corruption surrounding compulsory national service – especially in medical exemptions and the draft process – is some uniquely Bulgarian or Eastern European problem. It is simply more visible here – and, in a strange way, more honest. The same cor-

ruption exists behind the polished façades of Central and Western Europe, and in the United States as well – often in forms that are harder to see and far less accountable.

The very concept of compulsory service is a perversion in itself – not just in how it is applied, but at its core. Unlike compulsory service in ancient times, modern conscription treats the citizen, or in its discriminatory form the male citizen, as a potential resource at the disposal of the state.

It is no accident that this system of mass control emerged in the West precisely after the formal end of medieval feudalism, alongside the rise of the centralised state – as a continuation, in its own way, of the feudal logic of exploiting human beings as a resource, carried into the modern era by political, economic, and other "elites". That fact alone should be enough to give us serious pause.

A new form of "universal national service" may not resemble the old conscription systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. People may not be kept isolated from their families and friends, as is still the case in some forms of compulsory military service in many countries. Conscripts may not be sent for military operations abroad, but kept strictly for "defence". Training could take place in schools or universities, with young people still eating and sleeping at home.

That is entirely plausible – and perhaps that is exactly how it will be presented, at least initially: modern, mild, and harmless. But the principle remains the same: a brazenly imposed authoritarian obligation, and the treatment of coerced human beings as livestock in uniform – domesticated, assessed, tagged, herded, conditioned, fed, and exploited.

The institutions that will enforce it follow predictable patterns and operate with a sense of impunity. When the time comes, they will not hesitate to impose their will, in softer or harsher forms, across Europe. At the very least, they will try.

There will be new methods as well.

Digital systems now do in seconds what once took time and effort: automatically impose fines and other penalties, restrict access to bank accounts and services, continuously monitor administrative status, and maintain centralised registries containing all manner of information about the targeted person. The pressure can be constant, everywhere. And it will not stop with those subject to service. It will reach anyone who speaks out, refuses to be "re-educated", questions the system, or influences others.

It will not be easy. Not for me, and not for those like me.

It was not easy before either. There were years of resistance against a conscription system that was eventually "abolished" – or rather, suspended. It is already back in other European countries – in a "new form", with new justifications, and in some cases now extended even to women. There is a relentless push to make it part of the European Union's policy direction, one that could place pressure on every member state.

That changes nothing.

No amount of pressure will turn me into someone else's property.

Everything else comes down to price – and there is no price I am not prepared to pay for my freedom and my dignity.

Even suffering takes on a different meaning when you know you are not betraying yourself – when you refuse to become what you reject, when you refuse to be treated as a serf.

This is enough for a firm and principled stance.

Everything else follows. The only real choice is this: to say "no", fully aware of the consequences – or to give in under pressure. At this level of principle, there is no third option: either you refuse, or you yield. Because in the end, a person may suppress a simple question to himself, but can hardly escape it:

On what grounds does anyone treat me as a resource – and why do I allow it?

I will leave the reader with a few questions.

If you do not trust the words that come out of their mouths, why trust them with your life?

If you do not trust them enough even to go to the ballot box, how can you trust them with your children?[91]

And if they decide it is "necessary", why let them send you to the front lines – to kill or be killed – because they claim there is no other way?

No other way?

No way.

* * *

[91] "В Україні діти мають готуватися до війни ще зі школи – Верещук" ["Children in Ukraine must prepare for war already from school — Vereshchuk"], *TSN*, 23 May 2025; "Верещук про нову шкільну стратегію: Діти мають знати, що таке війна" ["Vereshchuk on the new school strategy: Children must know what war is"], *Gordonua*, 24 May 2025. Iryna Vereshchuk, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, frames war not as a temporary emergency but as a long-term historical condition – "for decades, if not centuries". This is the open normalisation of generational militarisation: where compulsory military service exists, education inevitably becomes part of the machinery of indoctrination and conditioning for "duty", turning war from an exceptional crisis into a permanent horizon of childhood.

Chapter 19
The Unspoken Consequences

There is one question the system consistently sidesteps: what happens if someone refuses compulsory "national service"? You will not get a clear, structured answer. You will not see a list of consequences laid out plainly and without spin.

Instead, you will be presented with the usual clichés about "duty", "society", "security", and "necessity". Those words say what the system wants; they say nothing about the price of saying no. And when that price enters the discussion, you can be sure that the sham of "public debate" will be framed around a single question: whether "national service" can be funded – as if no other cost existed.

Funding is never the real issue. If necessary, they will simply borrow more money. What you will not see are mainstream journalists asking the hard questions. Nor will you see anyone giving straight answers.

It is not that those answers do not exist. It is simply that no one wants to say them out loud.

If it were stated plainly that refusal leads to sanctions, restrictions, and coercion, the civilised façade would fall away, leaving nothing but the ugly machinery of enforcement. That is why the question is deflected.

The conversation is steered away from the point where it becomes obvious that what involuntary service ultimately demands is total obedience to the regime that enforces it. I maintain that no other state encroachment upon our inalienable rights, and such encroachments occur almost daily, demands from innocent adults such a complete surrender of sovereignty over themselves and such submission to the will of others.

Consider this: why does the military institution have its own code,

under which rules may apply that differ from those governing ordinary civic life? And what happens when civic life itself begins to be militarised? For some, spending their entire lives in a state turned into one vast barracks may not be a problem. For me, that prospect is unacceptable, and something tells me it is unacceptable to you as well, if you have made it this far in the book.

The expectation of the authorities is that people will accept their role without questioning it – without testing what happens if they refuse, and without looking for alternatives. That is when the system works best: without open conflict.

In this respect, I have observed distinct, often characteristic forms of conflict across Europe, without pretending to be exhaustive or reducing whole societies to stereotypes. "Conflict" does not necessarily mean burning shops and cars of the kind periodically seen on the streets of **Paris** whenever controversial laws are imposed. It may not even take the form of the mass street protests common across Europe.

In the **Balkans**, it may not look like conflict at all, instead taking the form of quiet, covert actions – sometimes even irrational – carried out in defiance of authorities perceived as illegitimate. In 2021–2022, the full vaccination rate in Bulgaria remained around 30%, despite sustained pressure applied through various channels. Some would say even that figure was inflated, and not without grounds. The reasons people gave for refusing – or for being "vaccine hesitant", as some would prefer to put it – were very different from my own, but they served the same purpose.[92]

In that sense, I remain cautiously optimistic: if there is renewed pressure to bring back conscription, the response may take a similar form –

[92] "Are we vaccinated against disinformation?", *Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom*, 15 January 2021. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom – a German political foundation affiliated with the Free Democratic Party and largely funded from public sources – lists otizvora.com ("From the Source") among three Bulgarian outlets it describes as spreading "vaccine disinformation". I accept the "recognition" with a bitter aftertaste: no specific argument is offered in my case, and my work relied on official sources and recognised experts. Unlike politically affiliated organisations presenting their own agenda as neutral fact-checking, my work is funded entirely through direct reader donations.

not open protest, but quiet refusal, avoidance, and non-compliance. Officeholders know this very well. They risk another public backlash, so for now they test the waters from time to time, keeping the rotting corpse of conscription buried – where it belongs.

In **Russia**, by contrast, even an elderly person holding an anti-war sign, or someone whose social media comments are interpreted as "discrediting the army", can face prison sentences harsher than many imposed for violent crimes.[93] Under such conditions, open public protest of any kind becomes unlikely. Pressure does not disappear, however; it goes underground. What follows may later be described, with the usual surprise of the ruling classes, as another "unexpected" revolution.

What I have never fully understood – and, frankly, am not sure I want to – is the "Es ist Pflicht" mentality: the almost instinctive acceptance of any obligation that I have encountered among many **Germans**. In my experience, many tend to police one another and enforce the most arbitrary rules – including against harmless, clueless tourists like me, who happen to be in the country for no more than a day. What is far more striking is that some try to impose the order they are used to even when they are guests in a foreign country.[94]

The only consolation I have found has come from conversations with other Germans who, half jokingly and half seriously, say that their language can seem optimised for military commands and brief, unquestioning obedience to whatever is imposed: "Jawohl" ("Yes, sir") – even when

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[93] "A Court in Rostov Region Sentenced a 72-Year-Old Pensioner to 5.5 Years in a Penal Colony in a Military 'Fake News' Case and for Calls to Extremism", *Mediazona*, 29 January 2024; "A Pensioner from Kurgan Was Sentenced to Eight Years in a Penal Colony over Posts on Odnoklassniki", *OVD-Info*, 4 July 2024; "A Moscow Court Sentenced a 59-Year-Old Nurse to 8 Years in a Military 'Fake News' Case", *Mediazona*, 3 October 2024.

[94] This should not be read as a blanket judgement on German "society", which, like any other, consists of individuals with different worldviews and loyalties. If my tone is sharp, it stems partly from my deep regard for German culture – a regard that does not extend to everything that has come from it. Modern mass conscription, shaped by the French Revolution and further developed in Prussia, belongs to one current. A very different current within German culture has profoundly shaped my worldview; I return to honour it in the Afterword.

they would rather say no to conscription or to active involvement in yet another world war. It is somewhat amusing – until it no longer is.

The central issue, however, is not only where such obedience leads, but why it is not discussed publicly at all. The moment that question is asked directly, everything shifts. It does not need to be answered by those in power. It is enough to see how it plays out in practice. In the past. Now. And in the future – because a system built on coercion and violence cannot become anything else.

This does not mean that choice disappears. It simply requires more courage and carries a higher cost. That is exactly why the question of consequences is avoided: it makes the price visible and drags the conversation out of comfortable abstractions and back into ugly reality.

The price is that a person ceases to be treated as a person and begins to live as someone else's property. "Only temporarily, for a limited period", they are quick to assure us. What a comfort. What a relief.

There is another reason for this silence. If the consequences are discussed openly, those who enforce them must also be brought into the conversation: specific officials, specific judges, specific police officers, specific doctors serving on medical evaluation boards, specific heads of local military offices. They bear personal responsibility for what they do – if anyone ever dares to hold them to account.

This is where the whole structure becomes vulnerable. On paper, the law provides procedures, appeals, judicial oversight, criminal liability for abuse of power. In practice, especially under conditions of mass coercion during a declared state of emergency, these mechanisms break down, become overwhelmed, or are neutralised by institutional loyalty to the system.

We saw the same pattern across Europe in real time during the so-called COVID-19 pandemic. Coercive restrictions were challenged in large numbers before national courts and before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, yet many cases never cleared procedural thresholds and were declared inadmissible or simply set aside. At the same time, member states froze or extended procedural deadlines and

scaled back court operations under emergency laws or emergency-like legal frameworks. By the time those measures ended, many complaints had lost their purpose – there was no longer anything left to remedy.

The same logic applies on the side of power: personal responsibility exists on paper, but almost nobody is made to answer in their own name. Those who carry out orders know that blame will be spread across a "framework" or a chain of command, rather than pinned on any individual. That is part of what shields this system and its actors from accountability.

As long as the discussion remains abstract – whether about collective necessity, the "system", or nameless processes – accountability becomes a ceremony, not a reality. "The system" is the comfortable story, because it is faceless.

There is one question that matters above all. That is why I return to it in almost every chapter. Everything else is abstraction and rhetoric, usually within a controlled media environment that keeps this question off the table. But it must be asked:

Are you a resource for a faceless, heartless system, or a human being with a will of your own?

Only the pretext for asking it again has changed.

* * *

Chapter 20
An Even More Deafening Silence

When no one talks about what happens when a person refuses to serve against their will, they feel free to avoid another question as well: what will happen once the new system of national service has been put into practice? Not in the abstract, but how real people forced to comply will be affected – and after them, society as a whole, however diverse it may be.

Coercion does not stay private. It spills outward and reshapes how everyone around it learns to behave. It creates an environment in which the norm is to look for ways out, to bend the rules, to buy solutions, and to adapt outwardly to pressure they do not accept inwardly.

That is precisely what is never discussed. On these points, silence becomes even more convenient. Only then can some people convince themselves that compulsory service imposed on others has nothing to do with them personally.

The consequences of such service are not acknowledged, not treated as foreseeable, and not discussed. The topic is framed as an administrative measure, as training, as a temporary necessity – as though it brought only benefits, untouched by the predictable and familiar harms such systems inherently produce.

First: emigration, and with it a deepening demographic crisis. When people know they can be used against their will, they start looking for a way out. Entirely logical. We have already seen how this unfolds under conscription, and not so long ago.

Whether or not travel restrictions are imposed on conscripts and those subject to mobilisation, there are always ways around them. This is left unsaid because it undermines the entire logic of coercion. In the

near future, however, this silence may morph into something far more sinister.

I hope I am wrong, but this time emigration may not solve the problem for conscientious objectors who do not wish to explain themselves to the abusive state, but simply to leave it. When the military district office is an app on your phone, linked to your digital identity and personal finances, emigration may not take one very far. Especially if states sign agreements for the extradition of evaders of "national service" under the banner of "common defence". I would be surprised if they did not, because I expect anything from their malice.

To avoid ending on an entirely pessimistic note, it should still be said that there is always a way out. In fact, everyday life shows us this everywhere around us.

For years now, Bulgaria has become a new home for thousands of Russian families who bring their children here – especially their sons – before the military authorities can reach them. More recently, thousands of Ukrainians have arrived as well. Both groups find ways to get out despite legal restrictions, administrative obstacles, personal risks, and often serious economic hardship. When a person seeks freedom, everything else does not disappear, but with will and resourcefulness it becomes an obstacle that can be overcome, not an inevitable sentence.

Ukrainians, in general, live alongside Russians in entirely ordinary, peaceful relations. Their children attend the same Bulgarian schools and grow up together. One is tempted to ask: who, then, produces hostility between peoples, and makes others pay for it with their lives?

Second: the return of a very specific, unavoidable kind of medical corruption. There can be no military training without prior medical evaluations. This means compulsory medical examinations even where the training does not take place in a closed environment such as barracks, or where it is simply incorporated into the educational system's curriculum. It is impossible to require physical exertion from a person without first making determinations as to who is fit and who is not.

But it also creates a market. Not a grey one. A black market – where doctors can profit by issuing false diagnoses and medical exemptions

to those trying to escape a service they never freely accepted. Even in the absence of actual service, some will refuse to be formally trained for the mobilisation reserve. It would be naive to pretend that this is not foreseeable. Medical corruption along these lines would return with renewed force, because systems built on coercion produce precisely such outcomes. When no one speaks of that corruption, it is treated as though it does not exist.

Third: the evaluations themselves. A direct claim on the body. Examinations. Assessments. Classification by "fitness" as routine practice. A clear expression of biopolitics, in Michel Foucault's sense.

This comes close to what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life": a person reduced, for administrative purposes, to biological and functional existence – examined, classified, and assigned as a body whose rights, voice, and will are subordinated to the state's claimed need to assess and use them.

If we follow Erving Goffman, this is where the "mortification of the self" begins: the erosion of personal and bodily autonomy. The institution seeks to produce a compliant subject: a person whose previous identity is stripped away – both literally and figuratively – until they are broken down and made to accept a new role imposed from above.

The silence in the "public debate" is equally telling when it comes to other key issues.

The impact on people's lives: interrupted careers, missed opportunities, disrupted plans – even the inability to plan at all while compulsory service hangs over a person's life. A blow to education, work, and families. This is not a "temporary inconvenience" with limited impact, but an intrusion with long-term consequences.

The erosion of trust. A government that cannot persuade and turns to coercion loses even more legitimacy. The same applies to the international institutions that enable, excuse, or bless such policies. Slogans do not fix that. The damage compounds. In my own case, trust in both local and international institutions has long since collapsed into outright distrust.

The risk of escalation. Today it is compulsory "training". Tomorrow it is mobilisation. Once created, the structure will be used. Why build up a mobilisation reserve if mobilisation is never meant to happen?

As Chekhov's famous dramatic principle has it: if there is a gun hanging on the wall in the first act, it must go off in the last.

The impact on the military itself. Instead of motivated people – the coerced. Instead of professionalism – box-ticking. Instead of quality – quantity. This is something experienced military professionals have been warning about for decades, yet it is conveniently ignored whenever conscription is pushed for political reasons.

Social division. Some will accept. Some will refuse. Some will evade. This creates tension not only between people and the authorities, but between people themselves. Divide and rule.

The normalisation of coercion. Today it is "only this" and "only for one demographic group". Tomorrow it will be "something more" and "we are all in this together". Once the principle has been breached, the line cannot simply be restored to where it was.

None of this is openly discussed. If it were, it would be clear that the price is not abstract. It is paid by real people, with real social consequences.

The burden of those consequences will not fall equally. Public visibility, a platform, an audience – these can offer a degree of protection from repression that others simply do not have. But the opposite may also be true: the most vocal may suffer most. If the state decides to assert its monopoly on coercion without restraint, open repression can become a demonstration of power – a warning to those more inclined to yield. Either way, "equality" has no place here.

So the next question follows naturally: why is this imposition on the individual kept out of view?

Because it disrupts the picture. The picture in which everything is "necessary", "temporary", and "in the name of something greater". In its place comes another picture, one in which each person is forced to ask: if this can happen to someone else, why could it not happen to me? And if repression can be used for this, what prevents it from being used for a thousand other assaults on personal freedom? That is precisely what

creates discomfort.

Once the consequences are seen for what they are, only one thing remains: this is coercion that produces predictable harm. No one wants to name that in advance, because this understanding might take root early and gather strength.

A human being is not a state resource, nor property – unless that person freely chooses to accept that role. And we have no right to stop them from doing so. Freedom includes the freedom of others to make choices we believe to be mistaken.

If I want freedom for myself, I want it for others as well. My position does not forbid anyone from joining the military, undergoing training, or going to war. I do not demand obedience from anyone. I demand only this: that no one impose obedience on me. It is a matter of principle.

And that is the least that can be expected – which is precisely why it has to be insisted upon.

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Chapter 21
One Argument Against Them All

The one question I have pressed, in different words and with different emphases, in almost every chapter so far can be tested against a wide range of established political and philosophical frameworks.

The classic framework comes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the "social contract" and the "general will", under which individuals are said to remain free even when compelled to obey a will other than their own. It follows the same logical pattern as the old trope of *ius primae noctis*: a lord claims the right to sleep with a bride before her husband on her wedding night, then assures her that, since the act served his recognised authority, nothing has really been violated, she remains intact, and society will regard her as unharmed.

With Thomas Hobbes, order rests on the need for security, which justifies strong authority. With John Locke, there is talk of consent and the protection of rights through the state. In the utilitarian line associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, what is right is commonly framed as whatever increases overall welfare.

More recent formulations – "justice as fairness" (John Rawls), "discourse ethics" or "communicative rationality" (Jürgen Habermas) – again bring us to norms that are supposed to bind everyone. Political language repeats the same thing in different words: "it was decided democratically", "all countries do it", "there is no other way", "duty", "security".

These lines appear different. Despite their differences, they are used to assert one thing: a person may be required to take part in military training, war, or another form of involuntary service, regardless of their refusal to accept military or state-imposed "solutions" as binding on

their own body and will.

Rousseau claims that through the "general will" individuals may be compelled to act against their particular will, and that this can still be presented as an expression of their freedom. **This does not explain coercion; it renames it.** Coercion does not become consent because it is called that.

To be "forced to be free" is nonsense. Coercion is, by definition, the opposite of freedom. Calling it freedom does not make it so.

In Hobbes, people are understood to surrender part of their liberty for the sake of security and order, thereby justifying strong authority. That is a generalisation in which I do not recognise myself. It explains why people generally seek some form of order, and why some may even seek authoritarian order, but it does not create a right for anyone to force me to give up my freedom, take part in war, or perform any form of involuntary service. The most it can justify is restraint against a person who poses a direct and immediate threat to others – not turning that person into an instrument of the state. Someone else's declared "necessity" does not provide grounds for imposing such "obligations" on me without consent, whether or not there is an "emergency". Hobbes's historical claim that people would prefer Leviathan (centralised state authority) to the state of nature (which, in his view, is a war of all against all) **describes one possible preference, not an argument that this preference is morally binding on everyone. Whether people would really slaughter one another if the state did not inject itself into almost all of their relations is also, to put it mildly, debatable.**

There is also something more specific in Hobbes that advocates of compulsory national service tend to omit. In Chapter XXI of *Leviathan*, Hobbes acknowledges that a person retains the liberty to disobey commands that directly require self-destruction or the abandonment of basic self-preservation. **The logic is clear: political obedience is grounded in the aim of preserving life, not surrendering it. That limitation is present in Hobbes himself; it is not an invention of mine.**

Hobbes does add a limit: refusal is denied where it would frustrate

the very end for which sovereignty was instituted, namely common protection. But this simply skips over the central question: who claims the right to decide whether current circumstances require my body and my life, and whether compulsory national service can even be presented as part of the "common defence" Hobbes had in mind? Who exactly are we defending ourselves against in peacetime? Is refusal accepted if the "sovereign authority" is neither sovereign from the decisions of external powers, nor democratically legitimate, as in Bulgaria, nor ethically legitimate, as in many other states? What is the "sovereign authority" supposed to do to me if I reject its claims, even though it does not allow such refusal? If it harms me, does that not justify my refusal to defend an authority that treats me as property whose opinion has no significance whatsoever?

Even within the most authoritarian classical framework of state power, obedience is not the same as ownership. Forcibly sending a person to face a real risk of death requires justification that goes beyond mere authority. **Nor is peacetime involuntary service justified merely because it is presented as preparation for common protection**, civic duty, or an alternative to military service.

The theoretical foundations of state power are narrower than what present-day extreme collectivists try to extract from them. This is worth remembering when companies such as Palantir urge "universal national service", suggest moving away from an all-volunteer force, and present future war as acceptable only if "everyone shares in the risk and the cost".[95]

In my own case, I do not reduce my refusal to the threat to my life. My refusal is not based on the idea that the battlefield is the only place where a person may encounter death or be maimed; in wartime, civilians too can be killed or grievously injured without ever having worn a uniform. The examples are countless in our own time: the tens of thousands of women and children killed under claims of "divine right" in

[95] "US Draft Update: Palantir Urges Universal National Service", *Newsweek*, 19 April 2026, updated 20 April 2026.

Gaza; the victims of "democratising" depleted uranium weapons from the Middle East to Serbia; and all those "liberated" from life in their sleep or while running for shelter from Orthodox rockets still wet with holy water.

If the barbaric laws of the twentieth century were restored – shooting "deserters" on sight – I still would not serve hypocrites whose moral and ethical corruption is complete. Their claim to rule over others has no relation to any human quality that could justify my obedience. Under the threat of a bullet, I do not bend. **My objection to compulsory service runs deeper than the instinct for survival. It is rooted in human dignity** – and in a refusal to be trained in obedience and in the killing of other human beings.

Locke maintains that authority is legitimate only through the consent of the governed. Consent, in this view, is a condition of legitimacy. Where there is no actual consent, none can be assumed. Ascribing consent does not create it; it only gives coercion a formal appearance of consent. **Locke himself, moreover, leaves room for resistance against authority that violates natural rights – and that is precisely where I stand.**

In the utilitarian line associated with Bentham and Mill, what is treated as right is whatever is said to produce the greatest overall good. But the "greatest good" is a subjective standard for evaluating projected outcomes, not a source of rights over any individual. Even if the majority benefits, it does not follow that coercing dissenters to participate is morally justified. In such a case, we simply have the tyranny of a self-proclaimed "majority" over a "minority". In reality, however, the situation is often the reverse: a minority coercing the majority – at times outright terrorising it.

Yet there is something in Mill that utilitarian, state-minded advocates tend to omit. In *On Liberty*, he formulates the so-called **harm principle: power may be exercised over the individual only to prevent harm to others, never for that person's supposed good or for an abstract "common good".** Refusing to take part in military training or in war – or in any form of involuntary service – is precisely such a case: an action that does not in itself constitute a direct harm to another person.

Moreover, Mill himself stresses that **personal autonomy is central to any justification of social order**. So even in Mill, read without selective trimming, compulsory national service finds little support. **His utilitarianism is liberal, not collectivist.**

Rawls presents a hypothetical situation in which people choose rules without knowing what their role in society will be – whether powerful or vulnerable, part of the majority or part of a minority. The aim is to arrive at "just" rules. This is neither a real choice nor an act of consent. No such decision involved my participation; the social order I would choose, as described later in this book, is an entirely different one.

Nothing in Rawls's reasoning implies that I am obliged to submit to such rules or to accept coercion to participate in war or in compulsory state programmes, imposed or suspended by political discretion. His "veil of ignorance" is a thought experiment, not an actual agreement. **A thought experiment does not create legal or moral obligations.** It may prompt reflection – nothing more.

Habermas argues that rules are valid if they emerge from open discussion in which all affected have the opportunity to participate and express their views. This does not mean that everyone agrees, but that the process itself is treated as sufficient to confer legitimacy on the outcome. In reality, such participation and consent are absent – especially among those who consciously refuse to vote, precisely in order to avoid participation in the system and withhold legitimacy from it.

Habermas's framework also overlooks a basic moral and political absurdity: even if there is broad public debate and a majority decision in favour of conscription or some other form of national service, the burden will fall on individuals who, at the time of the decision, are unborn or minors and have no right to vote. They will be "bound" by a decision in which they had no part whatsoever.

That is not consent. It is imposition with a delay.

* * *

What all these arguments have in common is this: **the moment of consent, as an expression of personal will, is bypassed.** Instead of

showing that I have accepted an obligation, consent is inferred by substitution – through procedure, through majority rule, through practice, through words like "duty", "the common good", and "the greater good".

The question remains – and it has not been answered.

On what grounds does anyone presume to have the right to decide whether my body, and the life and will it carries, will be used – for compulsory military training, for war, or for any form of involuntary service?

All these different political and philosophical formulations provide no answer and ultimately collapse into the same thing: a demand for submission presented as something more. My answer is simple: I do not recognise such a demand as something I am bound to honour.

Something should be added here to avoid misunderstandings: none of the theories discussed above was developed with the explicit purpose of justifying universal national service.

This includes civilian service as well, together with its degrading forms of "compensation": small payments in some systems, or petty social benefits in others – "free" transport, "free" healthcare, and similar scraps. They do not remove the original violation of personal autonomy. They only compound it by treating a human being as a resource whose will does not count, and then pretending that the problem has been solved with money, paperwork, or administrative perks.

Between a general principle and the specific obligation lies a vast gulf. It would have to be bridged, yet none of these philosophies provides such a bridge in any complete form. They do not do so because, in the context of compusory service, they cannot morally justify the assault on the individual's inalienable rights and freedoms. If such a bridge were built openly, the ethical foundation would begin to collapse: the political order they defend or imagine would appear, in plain terms, as a monopoly on violence – not only in practice, but even in theory.

The bridge between abstract theories and enacted policies is built elsewhere. And it must be said exactly where.

It is built least of all in parliamentary debate. Parliamentary debates on such matters are formal, brief, and often conducted under the label of "security", where justification is reduced to political slogans rather than philosophical or ethical reasoning. Present-day advocates of controversial state measures – including involuntary service, but not limited to it – rarely attempt to build the bridge honestly either. They borrow the language of duty, security, solidarity, and necessity, while leaving the central moral question unspoken. In those halls, no one quotes Hobbes or Rousseau. Instead, they point to geopolitical threats, alliance commitments, and decisions taken by the relevant advisory body, parliamentary committee, or military/supranational alliance.

The main bridge is built in the media. That is where the preparation takes place – gradual, cumulative, dispersed across thousands of small messages. That is where the impression is cultivated that "this is how it must be done, and there is no other way". That is where the backdrop is created against which parliamentary decisions later appear as the logical outcome of "public expectation", manufactured in advance by the media themselves.

At the same time, on the most sensitive issues, authorities lacking ethical or democratic legitimacy prefer silence. Not because they have no answer, but because no answer can withstand public scrutiny. If the predictable negative consequences of compulsory service were laid out openly – the full costs borne by real people, the measures applied against those who refuse, the actual data on the "effectiveness"[96] of conscription in modern warfare – what passes for public consent would begin to collapse. That is why they stay silent on the essential questions and speak only to the narrowest, most one-sided aspects of the issue.

This is another kind of bridge – built not of arguments, but of omis-

[96] "To Draft or Not to Draft? Inefficiency, Generational Incidence, and Political Economy of Military Conscription", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 2007; *Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force*, RAND, 1977; "The Army's Recruiting Crisis and Why a Draft Won't Solve It", RAND, 2023; "Training in the Russian Armed Forces", CNA, September 2023.

sions. It holds as long as no one presses on it. And that is precisely why books like this exist at all. They press.

* * *

These philosophies were not necessarily constructed to oblige anyone to submit to involuntary service of any kind. They are taken and used selectively by people who need fine words for ugly decisions. That is exactly why this bridge between philosophical foundations and political application is always unstable – it is built on borrowed ideas.

Let me draw a contrast.

My position does not require anyone else to accept it. It makes no claim over another person's body, conscience, or moral integrity – especially in matters of human dignity, personal agency, life and death. The frameworks outlined above either allow such claims to authority over everyone or, precisely because of their ambiguity, are used to support such claims at the expense of personal autonomy.

When the body, life, conscience, and moral axis of another human being are at stake, this asymmetry becomes decisive. A position that does not impose obedience on others is morally superior to one that does. Always.

* * *

Chapter 22
Token Concessions vs. Non-Negotiable Principles

They know they are not persuasive. They know there will be resistance – both open and hidden. Hidden resistance unsettles them more, because it cannot be easily managed and tends to produce unpredictable consequences. So they blur the issue with deliberately contradictory messaging.

The examples are already there. In Germany, the bureaucratic language is preparing the ground. The BBC reports that "German males aged between 17 and 45 may need to seek approval for lengthy stays abroad, under changes introduced as part of a new law which introduced voluntary military service".[97] This is then set against the reassurance: "Everyone is allowed to travel, [...] permission is not currently required".[98]

There is no difference in principle. The second is the first with a time delay – the mechanism exists; it simply has not been activated yet.

The same tactic shows up in proposals to mobilise German reservists up to the age of seventy.[99] It creates the impression that it might hap-

[97] "German males under 45 may need military approval for long stays abroad", *BBC News*, 5 April 2026. Note the headline's use of "may" – a characteristic softening of the mechanism created by the law. The description of the new framework as "voluntary military service" is equally telling: a law that builds the infrastructure for compulsory service and mobilisation is presented as a matter of personal choice.

[98] "German Bundeswehr says military-aged men can travel freely", *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2026.

[99] "Germany wants reservists up to 70 as troop shortage bites", *Brussels Signal*, 21 April 2026.

pen, but also might not. When nothing is presented as certain, resistance loses focus. It is no longer directed at a clearly defined opponent, but at a phantom that appears, disappears, and slips out of reach.

Alongside this, there will also be "concessions". The ground is already being tested.

"Needs-based conscription". Not mass conscription, not universal national service, but "only" a limited number of people each year – selected according to criteria supposedly indicating above-average motivation, but not necessarily on a voluntary basis. The effect on the public is clear: "it might not affect me, so there is nothing for me to resist". This ensures a predictable and manageable response, driven by personal interest rather than principle.

"Only a temporary restriction of certain civil rights" is presented as something to be endured – like serving a prison sentence. But this "temporary" is nothing new: conscription has always been exactly that. In some languages, such as Russian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian, the very term for it – *srochna sluzhba*, with slight variations across these languages – literally means "service for a fixed term".

The substance is unchanged; only the packaging is new. An old practice is repackaged and renamed to sound more acceptable, while in essence it remains the same: the restriction or removal of rights – not only civil rights, but fundamental ones – and the treatment of the individual as a resource. "For a certain period", they say – without mentioning that the obligation does not end with training, but extends into continuing reserve-service and call-up obligations.

"Deferred conscription". The law is passed, but supposedly will not be enforced "for now" or "until absolutely necessary". This serves two purposes. It calms the present mood and prepares the next stage. When the time comes, the mechanism is already in place.

Examples like these are easy to find. They all serve the same function: to create an impression of balance, reciprocity, and dialogue. In reality, they merely reinforce the opposing position of unilaterally exercised power. The state defines the rules, the exceptions, the state of emergency, and the "concessions". The individual remains

subordinate, forced to endure such brazen exercises in damage control, amplified by conformist media.

Some of these concessions may look like social responsibility and may even seem entirely logical from the state's perspective. None of that changes anything of substance.

The question is simple: why should I respect minor "concessions" and "compromises" when my principled conscientious refusal is not respected? The usual practice is to replace one form of involuntary service with another, relabelled as an "alternative". Norway is an exception, but only to a point. In all other cases, is principled conscientious refusal, including refusal to have one form of coercion replaced with another, even recognised as a possibility at all?

The answer is just as simple: I am under no obligation to respect their "concessions" when my own principled refusal receives no respect in return.

I am not arguing over conditions. I am not asking for better terms or softer procedures. I am arguing against the very existence of involuntary service, especially when it is backed by punitive measures and extends its claim even over conscientious objectors in one form or another. If my refusal is not accepted, every "softer" version is the same claim over me under a softer name. It remains unacceptable.

Naturally, I will not respect even softer forms of pressure meant to push me into involuntary service. To compromise here is like saying you do not consent to others having authority over your body, yet you agree to have that boundary violated "just a little" so that they, too, can be satisfied. In both cases, it is humiliation and a surrender of personal boundaries.

There is something else that needs to be said plainly. A false choice is not answered by picking "the lesser evil". It is answered by refusing to play the game at all.

When you are offered a choice between armed service and unarmed service, you do not say, "Fine, I'll take the unarmed one". You say, "I re-

ject a choice in which both options treat me as your property – regardless of the role assigned to me."

What I contribute to society, and how I contribute, is mine alone to decide. And if that is not acceptable, then let them drop the masks and show themselves for what they are through the predictable acts that follow: formal sanctions, administrative harassment, pressure on employers, frozen accounts on unrelated pretexts, media hit pieces, and whatever else the repressive machinery can produce.

This is not radicalism. It is consistency.

The radicalism is theirs. It is visible both in the formal enforcement mechanisms built around compulsory service and in the informal reprisals that appear whenever people refuse to comply: financial pressure, professional exclusion, reputational attacks, and exemplary punishment. We have already seen such patterns elsewhere – from Canada's treatment of protesting truckers to the discharge of thousands of US service members under vaccine mandates.

My position is something far simpler: consistency in refusing to become an involuntary servant, whatever the cost.

Compromise has meaning only between equals – between people who respect one another, between sides that recognise each other's principles and seek common ground. If no common ground can be found, then so be it – in a better world, each side would go its own way.

Between coercion and freedom, there can be no compromise. No amount of token concessions changes the substance: softened force is still force. It simply looks easier to accept, and some people will.

I will not. How it appears on the surface is the least of my concerns. When the very concept of involuntary service is rotten to the core, no amount of polish can hide the stench of tyranny.

* * *

Chapter 23
Declaration

The arguments have been made. What follows is not another argument. It is where I stand.

War is not an abstraction. Nor is it the stylised, special-effects spectacle presented by Hollywood, YouTube, and TikTok. It means killing or being killed – not pixels on a screen, but living human beings. In a connected world, they may well be people we know and care about. People like me, people like you – people who may also be ordered to kill strangers, or even people they know.

That is the perversity of it. I know just enough Germans, Russians, Greeks, Serbs, Britons, Americans, Turks, Romanians, Ukrainians, Poles, and others to know this: there are indeed palpable differences between nations, but they pale in comparison with the distance between those nations and their so-called political elites.

Everything else is language meant to soften or conceal that.

My refusal is specific. I refuse military training, even when it is reduced to "non-committal" two hours a week during which I am lined up and expected to salute them. I refuse other forms of involuntary service. I refuse to take part, against my will, in military responses to national or international crises. I refuse to be treated as an object or as someone else's resource.

I have a mother and a father. They took care of me when I was a child. I also have a Father in the higher sense. He takes care of me now, without imposing Himself on me – unlike the nanny state, which tries to do exactly that through "services" I never asked for.

I do not want the "care" of a self-appointed stepmother – especially when that care is openly imposed against my will.

Whether I survive a future war is my concern. If I do not, the loss is mine.

This declaration is not open to negotiation.

* * *

We can now venture into the book's most difficult pages.

Chapter 24
Those Who Beat the War Drums

In Chapter 21, I argued that the bridge between philosophical frameworks and imposed obligations such as compulsory service is not built primarily in parliaments, but in the media. Now, here is how that bridge is actually constructed.

It is naive to speak of a "fourth estate" as if journalists still acted as an independent check on power. Whatever truth the phrase may once have contained, it no longer works as a general description of major media. To the extent that investigative journalists and independent authors still exist, they are either isolated or have deliberately distanced themselves from major media outlets.

That is the landscape. What follows is a firsthand account from someone who saw it from the inside and chose to walk away from what I call the "snake pit".

Editorial meetings where the decision is not just what qualifies as news, but what is explicitly off the table. Articles reviewed – and sometimes rewritten – by corporate owners or advertisers before they reach the reader. Pre-written "interviews" supplied by NGOs, waiting only for the approved establishment "experts" to have their names attached to the prepared answers. Quotes delivered before the questions are even asked. Stories commissioned with the conclusion already agreed upon.

This is not the exception. It is the workflow. And this is only the beginning.

The so-called mass media – better described as media of mass indoctrination – do not stand between the citizen and power. They stand beside it, whether political or corporate, and speak on its behalf. They are where power first tests its ideas before turning them into policy.

It begins with suggestions, with preparing the ground. There is no law yet. No formal decision. The topic is simply placed in public view.

Politicians do not have to state it directly, unless they want to. The media do it for them. Then a politician picks up that planted suggestion and presents it as public opinion.

This is not a reflection of reality, but the construction of a counterfeit version of it. What Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky called "manufacturing consent" – the production of apparent agreement through control over the frame of debate – is not a theory. It is daily work.

This role is not accidental. Corporate media operate inside the same ecosystem of interests that benefits from the normalisation of "universal national service" – a circle extending from the military-industrial complex to intelligence and technology corporations. It is no coincidence that the issue of involuntary service has surfaced in various political and corporate initiatives, from Rishi Sunak's 2024 promise to Palantir's public lobbying in 2026 for universal national service.

In the same register sits the call by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in 2026 for the immediate creation of a common European army – ***"not in ten years, not in two, but as soon as tomorrow"***.[100] In media coverage, this was framed as an act of geopolitical responsibility, a bid for sovereignty against pressure from Washington. Yet what is telling is that Sánchez is not talking about strengthening the European pillar within NATO, but about a separate structure – an army outside the alliance, under European command and drawing on a European manpower base. That distinction raises a question he himself avoids articulating: **how will the soldiers for such an army be recruited, if it is to be large enough to replace the American security umbrella?** The volunteer principle on which most European armies have rested since the end of the Cold War fits poorly with the level of autonomy Sánchez is

[100] Sánchez, Pedro. Speech at the European Pulse Forum, Barcelona, 10 April 2026. Cited in: "Spain's Sánchez Urges Immediate Steps Toward European Army", *Europe Diplomatic*, 10 April 2026. The call was widely reported and corroborated across multiple outlets, including *The Independent*, *Daily Sabah,* and *Roic News* (11 April 2026). None of them raised the question of how recruitment would actually work.

demanding. His call for a common European army does not yet explicitly include compulsory service – but it is the logical precondition for it, one that has been deliberately left unspoken. The media's silence on the question of "how exactly will recruitment work?" is itself part of the message.

This is not a dispute between media and power. It is an internal conversation within the same circle, staged in public as a "societal debate".

The same script appears in the European Commission's 2024 preparedness agenda.[101] The report was authored by Sauli Niinistö, former President of Finland and, at the time, Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission. He is not an outlier, but another establishment voice in the same security-policy chorus as Sunak, Palantir, and the wider security-tech bloc.

The report's key normative line is blunt: security is treated as the foundational public good – the condition for everything else. In practice, this framing often functions as a false dilemma: security versus liberty. Once that binary is accepted, curtailment of freedoms can be sold as prudence, and coercive methods can be justified as the price of a supposedly safer future. What is offered is not real freedom from risk, but a permanent promise of abstract security in exchange for real, immediate compliance.

The language is predictably managerial and sanitised, but the substance is explicit. The report states that ***"new options are currently being considered in many Member States – not only in the form of conscription, but also through other legal obligations citizens have to contribute to security and preparedness in different capacities".*** It then normalises participation ***"through voluntary and mandatory means".***

This is the core mechanism: even those not directly conscripted into the armed forces can still be drawn by law into militarisation through obligatory civilian roles, assigned duties, and institutional compliance. Where such intentions exist, even countries that retain male-only military conscription are unlikely to leave women untouched: they too can be drawn into "supporting roles", whether personally, through employ-

[101] "Safer Together: A Path towards a Fully Prepared Union" (Niinistö report), European Commission, 2024.

ment channels, or both.

Poland already shows what this mechanism looks like in practice. In 2026, around 235,000 people are required to undergo "military qualification" procedures, meaning medical examinations before official boards: not only men from various age groups, but also women in professions considered useful to the armed forces, including medical personnel, veterinarians, psychologists, rehabilitation specialists, laboratory staff, and professionals in IT, telecommunications, navigation, and translation.[102] The stated purpose is to determine their physical fitness for service. The state offers no clear explanation for why citizens of both sexes must be screened on such a scale within a single year.

Poland's new conscription notification rules show how a general and somewhat abstract obligation can turn into an immediate command: in the event of mobilisation or war, a summoned person must report to the designated location within no more than six hours; failure to do so is treated as a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment for a term of no less than three years.[103] In this sense, "qualification", which would more accurately be called inventorying, and military registration are not merely formal procedures lingering from the inertia of an earlier era of military conscription. Poland is a clear example of a state that treats its population as a resource to be deployed through obligations and commands even without formally restoring universal national service.

Against this background, the slogan ***"Empowering citizens as the backbone of societal resilience and preparedness"*** is so cynical in context. The Niinistö report frames empowerment as submission and deeper integration into command structures: citizens are to ***"play an active role in ensuring crisis preparedness and first response"***, while the boundary between voluntary contribution and mandatory obligation is deliberately blurred. The result is not empowerment in any meaningful civic sense, but managed military-style subordination under a security rationale.

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[102] "Wojsko wezwie 235 tys. osób do kwalifikacji wojskowej. Znamy plany MON", *Next. Gazeta.pl*, 14 July 2025.

[103] "Tylko 6 godzin na stawienie się do wojska albo więzienie. Oto nowe rozporządzenie", *Money.pl*, 14 January 2024.

Most revealing is the call for "structured exchanges among Member States" to identify ***"best practices in relation to national service and conscription models ... that can serve as inspiration to others, are potentially transferable, and can be further facilitated at the EU level"***. The cynicism of "best practices" is hard to miss: in this context, the phrase points to the refinement and scaling of techniques of compulsion. Formally, this is presented as co-ordination and mutual learning. Materially, it is an EU-facilitated, supranational policy channel through which coercive models can be standardised, legitimised, and diffused while preserving plausible deniability about where pressure originates.

The section on youth policy is equally telling. The report calls to ***"develop targeted incentives to increase the appeal of careers in defence, security and emergency response among younger generations, working together with trade unions and employers' organisations"***, including measures tied to the "Quality Jobs Roadmap (2024–2029)". Read plainly, this points towards institutional pressure on labour-market intermediaries – employers and unions – to adapt workforce management around state security priorities, making it easier for young workers to be channelled towards defence-linked initiatives when required.

EU officials have even called on Europe's defence industries to move into "war economy mode".[104]

This pressure does not operate in a vacuum. The same ecosystem that defines the threat, frames the response, and profits from permanent mobilisation – political executives, defence bureaucracies, military contractors, data firms, and security consultancies – also defines what counts as "responsible citizenship".

Under compulsory service and adjacent mandatory schemes, ordinary people are treated less as rights-bearing citizens and more as mobilisable assets: their time, labour, skills, and bodily risk become materials to be allocated and consumed by a fused public-private security apparatus.

[104] "EU-Ukraine Defence Industries Forum bolsters cooperation between Ukrainian and European defence industries", European Commission, 6 May 2024; "EU aims to shift European arms industry to 'war economy mode'", *Reuters*, 4 March 2024.

None of this is communicated to the public in such direct terms. The report itself speaks of ***"raising public awareness of the risk landscape without creating panic"*** and, elsewhere, ***"without fostering anxiety"***. Corporate media reproduce exactly this grammar of calibrated disclosure: never a direct statement of liberty loss, always a gradual, technocratic, emotionally softened narrative. Coercive policies are repackaged as duty, resilience, solidarity, even opportunity, until what would once have been rejected as intolerable begins to feel normal, reasonable, and morally necessary. This is how political conditioning works in practice: the boiled-frog method, applied to entire societies.

How often do corporate media even bring the EU *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* to their audiences' attention? This policy framework was approved in March 2022 by the Council of the European Union, the body in which ministers from the governments of all EU Member States take joint decisions. I doubt that the overwhelming majority of people have ever heard of it through mainstream media, even though its implications may affect them personally, their families, and society as a whole.

Mainstream talking heads certainly do not walk audiences through what such a framework may mean in practice: **targets for deployable forces, permanent readiness requirements, and therefore a continuous demand for people – reserves, training pipelines, and sustainable rotation cycles. From there, the downstream pressure on national manpower policy is predictable: more reserve obligations, broader national-service schemes, and, in some countries, renewed conscription.**

But this causal chain is exactly what is kept blurred. If the public could clearly see how supranational strategy is translated into domestic coercive capacity, the managed "consensus" would begin to crack.[105]

This is how the interplay between power and media presents coercive intentions as reasonable and acceptable at every level of the hierarchy. To achieve this, the carefully cherry-picked opinions of supposedly random people on the street are also used.

[105] "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence", *EEAS*, 2022; "A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade" (press release), *Council of the EU*, 21 March 2022.

Then comes the framing. The central question is never asked. What justifies the state in forcing people to serve – whether through training, labour, or assigned civic duties – against their will under threat of sanctions? This is a practice that has been described, from libertarian and anti-war perspectives among others, as a modern form of slavery[106] – yet it is almost never addressed. And when it is, it is brushed aside in passing, with a theatrical raised eyebrow as if it were the most ridiculous thing imaginable, or with open mockery. It is then drowned in a flood of "information", on the assumption that coercion is somehow already justified and therefore beyond question, and the discussion shifts to everything else:

How long should the service last? Should it apply only to men, or to women as well? Should it be military, or civilian service?

Very often, another question is raised – one that can only be described as cynical: **how much will taxpayers be forced to pay for compelling other people to do something they have not chosen freely?** Not in these exact words, of course, but that is precisely the meaning. It is framed as an important economic issue. Not even a political one.

Naturally, ethics, morality, and other such "ideologies" have no place within the media's supposed presentation of "all points of view". Nor is there any room in the "public discussion" for the possibility of refusing to serve without sanction. Instead, the heralds speak:

"It's decided". "We're (re)instating national service". "We're doing it!" At times, we even see hype this direct and absurd. This was the case with some media outlets in Croatia and Germany, but such language has long since been adopted in Bulgaria as well: ostensibly an inclusive "we", but in reality: my body, your life, and our children's future.

Then comes the grand theatre, meant to prove that "all perspectives" have been covered. Panels. Interviews. Commentary. Different faces, drawn from a narrow circle. The same core thesis with minor variations.

Resistance has not disappeared. It has been fragmented. Some of us oppose conscription or "national service" and reject it on principle. Others oppose it not out of principle, but because of the direction of

[106] Jacob G. Hornberger, "Conscription Is Slavery", *The Ron Paul Institute*, 21 March 2019; Ron Paul, "Conscription Is Slavery", *Antiwar*, 14 January 2003.

the conflict. In the case of some Bulgarians, for example, the European Union is already rearming for a confrontation which, in their eyes, is aimed at their beloved Russia.

These two positions do not come from the same place and do not rest on the same grounds. Many of those nostalgic for the socialist past, as well as many pro-Russia sympathisers, are situational opponents of compulsory service – because they dislike the direction of the conflict. But their position is not principled. It is contingent.

Were Bulgaria to leave NATO and, God forbid, return to Russia's orbit, those same people would not be my allies against compulsory military training or the mobilisation of unwilling individuals. It is not difficult to foresee that they would then become my opponents. They will do so because such "national service", which they themselves will begin defending in the name of a "strong army and a strong state", will be wrapped in rhetoric about resisting the West, which they supposedly despise whenever they are not visiting it for work or as tourists. Absurd, yet entirely sufficient for them to endorse sending unwilling people into military service.

My position does not depend on circumstance. It does not depend on the era. It does not depend on who demands coercion or in whose interest. The answer remains the same.

My position and the pro-Russian position are not the same. They often contradict each other. And yet, the sycophants of power place them in the same basket. To make them appear as one and the same. To thicken the smoke in the war for people's minds and make it as difficult as possible to find one's way through it.

Corporate media do not operate on principles. They operate through labels. They force independent voices into predefined frames, even when they do not fit. And more often than not, they simply ignore them. Because even negative attention is still attention.

The primary goal is to make such views appear non-existent. If they are mentioned at all, the ready-made label follows: "Russian propaganda". No argument. No explanation. No engagement with the content. This supposed "Russian propaganda" comes from an active critic of Kremlin policy and of its army – notorious for its mistreatment of its own conscript soldiers. They know the truth perfectly well. But in this dirty busi-

ness there are no friendships, not even professional courtesy.[107]

This "us versus them" strategy, together with the methods described above, spares the heralds the most important task: responding to real objections and genuine public sentiment.

Never expect to see a principled position presented, examined, or refuted on its merits by the media of mass indoctrination. What you will see instead is a cast of carefully selected actors staging performances of false dilemmas, deliberately circling around the core questions. The aim is simple: to make you feel alone with your "different opinion", and to begin to doubt it.

Their system depends on all of this. If they decide, unilaterally, to restore, expand, or harden involuntary service of any kind, this media pressure – and more – will follow. It is inevitable.

Lieutenant General André Denk, Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency, bluntly stated in April 2026 that if the geopolitical situation worsens, compulsory military service across EU member states will become an absolute necessity.[108] His logic is stripped of all moral considerations: the voluntary model is dead and coercion is the only remaining option. Naturally, no mainstream media outlet dared challenge this authoritarian shift – they simply echoed it as an indisputable fact. This is exactly how they view us – not as human beings, but as bio-units to be used whenever their arithmetic demands it. They want us to believe that resisting this meat-grinder is an error on our part.

But something else matters more: the mistake is not yours. And you are not alone. No matter how loudly and tirelessly the talking heads try to convince you otherwise.

* * *

[107] My position on political Russia and its conscription system is well documented in two previous books and dozens of published pieces. What matters here is simpler: even if I were a "Russophile", my argument would remain valid. It is not built on "Russia is good, the West is bad", nor on the mirror image, "the West is good, Russia is bad". I do not operate through false dilemmas, or through positions that exist only to justify each other.

[108] "André Denk, jefe de la Agencia Europea de Defensa: 'El servicio militar obligatorio puede ser necesario en el futuro'", *El País*, 12 April 2026.

Chapter 25

We Are Not Alone – Not Even Globally

We have seen it countless times: those in power, and the media that serve them, claim – and will go on claiming – that refusing to obey or otherwise opposing any form of state-imposed diktat is a marginal position; that your case is isolated; that you simply do not understand how politics works. This is especially true of polarising issues such as conscription – whether it has been abolished, reinstated, or left somewhere in the grey zone between the two.

There are few subjects, however, on which I have seen such dedicated malice over the past decade as during the restrictions and dictates meant to make as many people as possible accept injections presented as a collective duty, despite serious remaining uncertainty. On that basis, if a military conflict, mass conscription, or mobilisation really does come, it is not difficult to imagine that the terror directed at "anti-vaxxers" may pale beside what awaits conscientious objectors.

In Russia, those who evade military service are commonly called "uklonisty" – "evaders" – and are treated not only by the media but also by law as criminals. In the United States, things are not entirely different, although I will accept that the term "draft dodgers" does not carry the same criminal connotation. I will spare you the Bulgarian equivalent; I am sure you have one of your own, wherever you happen to live.

The fear generated during states of emergency and wartime, which the media are traditionally more than willing to cultivate, can cause many people to lose the capacity for sober judgement and even common sense itself. This creates a convenient atmosphere. The very possibility of dissent and conscientious objection can be severely restricted,

or denied outright – only "temporarily", of course. This is the totalitarian principle of enforced submission under military-style discipline, refined by the Bolshevik experiment, thoroughly tested in Eastern Europe, and now increasingly taking root around the world as a model of governance:

"Silence! No reasoning! Obey the order!"

A conventional army may require obedience in action. A totalitarian army requires submission in thought. Judging by the language of the preparedness reports discussed earlier, the European Union is now drifting into the same logic: it does not seriously contemplate disagreement with the policy itself, but only the means of imposing it, managing public fear, and conditioning acceptance.

Unable to offer a single ethically defensible argument for coercing entire societies into war economies and military obligations, the opposing side often pretends not to understand how anyone could refuse to "defend their homeland and their loved ones". But that is not the question. The real question is whether there is only one way to do so. If there is more than one, what kind of reckless person would choose to do so under the command of the very internal and external actors who helped bring disaster upon that homeland? Why should we trust these very same people when they do not hesitate to exploit even our love for our loved ones as a pretext for dragging us into their wars?

Think about it. They openly acknowledge that they are considering the imposition of ever more military and civilian obligations, ostensibly for our security. And yet their efforts to train us to obey are far more intensive than their diplomatic efforts to prevent the war itself. More often than not, their so-called peace negotiations do not even include the other side of the potential conflict.

If war comes because their diplomacy, social engineering, and military reforms have failed, why should anyone feel obliged to remain under their military-authoritarian command? That sounds less like duty than suicidal madness.

Their insinuation is always the same: that we are alone in our thinking, alone in our discontent, and alone in our refusal to accept their unilaterally imposed solutions as the only possible and unquestionably benevolent ones. But that insinuation falls apart the moment we look beyond their centres of social engineering and propaganda.

Jonah Walters, writing in *Jacobin*, states his position bluntly: "Military conscription is a crime against humanity."[109] He can hardly be dismissed as "Russian propaganda": much of his article illustrates the fundamental nature of state violence through examples of conscription in Russia and Ukraine.

Thomas J. DiLorenzo, writing in *The Misesian* from the standpoint of classical libertarian critique – a tradition with deep roots in the work of Murray Rothbard and Ronald Hamowy – puts it this way:

> *"For those who are killed in battle or executed for desertion, conscription is worse than slavery because it robs them of their very lives. To this day, one of the penalties for desertion in wartime is death. At various times in history the U.S. government has shot deserters in firing squads, and it has even imprisoned or shot civilian conscription protesters. Even if one volunteers for the military, one immediately becomes a slave to the state because it is illegal to leave. The penalties for desertion apply to both volunteer recruits and conscripts."*[110]

Merely clever rhetoric? No. What we have here is a functional description of how the system treats the human being: as a resource to be exhausted, if necessary, to the point of death.

These are only two positions among many others. They differ in style and emphasis, but converge at the same point: they draw a personal boundary against the claims of unrestrained power. That boundary is physical, moral, and spiritual. Personal in nature, yet universal in meaning: what protects one person from state violence protects everyone.

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[109] Jonah Walters, "Military Conscription Is a Crime Against Humanity", *Jacobin*, 7 March 2022.

[110] Thomas J. DiLorenzo, "Why Military Conscription Is Worse Than Slavery", *The Misesian*, 3 September 2024.

If Walters and DiLorenzo are examples from the left and the libertarian tradition, there are others who approach the same question from a very different direction. One of them is Brandon Smith of *Alt-Market* – an alternative commentator whose views are often associated with the American right. What makes his position interesting is that, unlike me, he has no aversion to weapons or their use. He regards them as legitimate primarily for self-defence, and openly acknowledges the possibility of a new civil war, should it come to that.

I do not believe that armed force produces lasting solutions to disputes, internal social problems, or international conflicts. But I do not judge him for it – that is a matter of personal worldview and conviction. He is American; his context is not mine.

What matters is this: no one should be obliged to fight for a power they consider illegitimate, or for a cause they do not share. On that point, we stand on common ground. And that common ground reveals something essential: the refusal of involuntary service is not confined to any single value system. It is not "pacifist", "left-wing", "libertarian", or "anarchist". It is human.

Smith notes:

> *"I was watching a news broadcast from the BBC a few months ago in which a male journalist of military age tried to argue rational points on why men in Britain are reticent to go to war for the existing government. He noted that they do not believe that the leftist politicians in power represent them anymore and they feel they are being rapidly replaced by third worlders with hostile ideologies. Why would they fight for such a government?"*[111]

I would not use the same language to describe people from poorer countries, nor do I believe that entire populations should be reduced to hostile stereotypes. But that does not erase the question being asked. The question is simple and uncomfortable. If you do not believe that those in power represent you – if you believe they act against the na-

[111] Brandon Smith, "World War and the Plan to Control or Kill Young Western Men", *Alt-Market*, 23 December 2025.

tion's interests – there is no reasonable obligation to let yourself be coerced into fighting for them.

Smith then adds something even larger, concerning the possible reinstatement of the draft in the United States:

> "**A Push For A New Draft**
>
> *Let's be honest, current US recruitment numbers are a joke and the wokification of our military is making it weaker by the month. No American citizen with a legit warrior mindset or combat aptitude is going to join that circus freak show voluntarily. The establishment will try to regale conservatives and patriots with visions of "fighting the good fight for family and country" but most will not buy in. With attempts to ignite multiple fronts against Russia, China and the Middle East, they will start talking about a new draft system.*
>
> *My belief is that this will fail miserably and would start a civil war rather than fill the ranks of the Army or Marines, but they may have a scheme to deal with this outcome..."*[112]

With hindsight, his warnings from late 2025 look less like commentary and more like an accurate roadmap of the geopolitical traps we are stepping into today.

I have no need to take a position on America's internal divisions. Bulgaria has more than enough of its own. What interests me here is his response to the underlying principle: when people no longer see authority as legitimate, the appeal to duty fails, and only coercion remains. But coercion cannot create loyalty – it can only provoke resistance.

Smith then adds another layer:

> *"In Europe, the current goal of the establishment is to crush the spirits of western men while protecting migrants as a precious commodity. In the UK, the narrative is focused like a laser on white conservative males as public enemy #1, while simultaneously*

[112] Brandon Smith, "It's a Trap! The Wave of Repercussions as the Middle East Fights the Last War", *Alt-Market*, 11 October 2023.

> *demanding that these same men "prove their patriotism" by fighting for the elites against Russia."*[113]

Again, I do not need to adopt Smith's framing in order to recognise the conflict in its essential form: a demand for sacrifice without representation. People are treated as suspect, dismissed, or politically unwanted – and then asked to prove their loyalty through imposed involuntary service and even sacrifice.

At this point, the illusion falls away. There is coercion – and there is readiness to resist.

From the Christian pacifism of Tolstoy and the Mennonites,[114] through the libertarian critique of Rothbard and DiLorenzo, through the anti-war left tradition represented here by *Jacobin*, and on to contemporary alternative or right-leaning voices like Smith, the rejection of involuntary service is one of the few positions capable of binding together otherwise incompatible worldviews.

These are different voices. Different convictions. Different contexts.

Yet all of them mark a personal and social boundary they will not allow to be crossed. And if it is crossed, there will be a response – individual or collective, overt or covert, but a response nonetheless.

No one has the moral right to strip you of your natural, God-given rights and dignity and use you as a resource against your will.

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[113] Brandon Smith, "World War and the Plan to Control or Kill Young Western Men", *Alt-Market*, 23 December 2025.

[114] The Mennonites are a Christian denomination that emerged in the sixteenth century and was named after the Dutch religious leader Menno Simons. Pacifism is a central tenet of their faith: they refuse to bear arms or participate in war on any grounds. Historically, they were persecuted in Europe as religious dissenters who rejected the state church and refused to swear oaths of allegiance to secular authorities. Following the introduction of mass conscription in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, Mennonites consistently refused to perform military service, which in many cases forced them to emigrate. Today, their communities are concentrated primarily in North and Latin America.

This is the credo of sound judgement and human dignity. Everyone senses it, yet many remain silent – out of self-interest or other motives, especially when coercion supposedly does not affect them personally, or when it gives them greater power over others. Even the opposing side understands this; it shows in the insidious way it operates. That is why the claim that you are alone does not hold.

They simply do not show all those who think as I do, alongside those I have just quoted. They maintain the illusion that you have no support, that there is something abnormal about your refusal. They know that most people find it especially difficult to stand firm when they are not part of a group.

But this, too, is an illusion. In reality, quiet, even covert resistance – whether alone or with a few like-minded people – is far more effective than crowds and mass protests. Street protests are rarely enough: their energy is easily channelled by agents of the establishment, and their moral foundations can quickly be drowned in blood and repulsive scenes provoked by provocateurs. Declarations and protests mean nothing if, in the end, you submit.

The crucial thing is to work slowly, patiently, and systematically. Like water: it keeps moving, and in the end it always finds a way through.

This is exactly how the establishment operates. In many countries, we may be the majority, but we are scattered. They make up for their smaller numbers with organisation and control of the media. To paraphrase Leo Tolstoy, the state is a union of people who exercise violence over the rest of us.[115] They are tightly coordinated and highly disciplined – conditioned to move under the whip.

They are told, "Jump", and they jump – in unison, against us.

We can do the same; it does not require any special skills or courage

[115] See, for example: Leo Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is Within You", trans. Louise Shanks Maude (London: William Heinemann, 1894); Leo Tolstoy, "Superstition of the State" (1910).

to obey. But we can do something greater: we can refuse to jump when we recognise coercion, individually or together – though that does require both inner and outer effort, and real courage. In doing so, we place our human dignity and conscience above the whip.

That is exactly what makes us stronger in every meaningful sense.

* * *

Chapter 26
Judicial Gaslighting

My previous book on the subject had a different focus, but it was no less critical of the media and of a state behaving like a rabid god. Back then, however, I was more restrained in my assessment of the judiciary in several chapters. In *Referendum: Conscription*, I even wrote at one point that I would not be surprised if the judiciary produced some unexpected and welcome surprises.

Meanwhile, a series of legal and political events in different parts of the world, all directly connected to this subject, led to one of those rare moments in which the facts themselves compel a person to reconsider their views. So let me state it plainly: what follows is a rebuttal of my own earlier position.

Once the media have finished preparing the ground and a topic already appears "settled", it is the legal institutions' turn to give it its final shape. The courts do not introduce conscription or any other form of involuntary service, nor impose it directly, but they grant it what matters most: legal validity. This legal validity must not be confused with moral legitimacy – the distinction is set out in Chapter 10. In other words, the courts take coercion already written into law, clothe it in judicial reasoning, and present the resulting machinery as something permissible, reasonable, and, in the end, inevitable.

In recent years, a recurring pattern has emerged. This is not about a single ruling or a single country, but about a consistent line running across different jurisdictions. Courts do not answer the question of whether compulsory service is morally or ethically permissible. They shift the conversation, focusing instead on who has the authority to impose it, on whom it may be imposed, and under what conditions. The

very act of coercion involved in involuntary service, however, is treated as a natural, almost godlike prerogative of the state – something that simply exists as a legal possibility, rather than something requiring ethical justification.

This is judicial gaslighting: the moral question is made to disappear, while the legal procedure is presented as if it had answered it.

In the **United States**, for example, the case National Coalition for Men v. Selective Service System appeared to mark a breakthrough. A federal court in Texas held that male-only mandatory registration for the draft was unconstitutional.[116] The logic is straightforward: once women have access to combat roles, the reasoning of the earlier decision in Rostker v. Goldberg no longer holds. That ruling, from 1981, upheld the existing framework precisely on the grounds that women were then excluded from combat roles – a circumstance that no longer applies. At first glance, this looks like the beginning of real change.

The higher court, the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, did not deny the problem. It refused to resolve it. The reasoning was formal, yet revealing: until the US Supreme Court changes its position, lower courts are bound to follow the existing precedent. Thus, the issue was not resolved – only deferred. In 2021, the Supreme Court itself declined to intervene, arguing that Congress was considering reforms. A familiar game of passing the buck – one in which no institution takes responsibility.[117]

Politics was supposed to resolve it. Politics did not resolve it. The system remained.

This entire procedure – lawsuits, appeals, reversals, refusals, and pro-

[116] In many European countries, including Bulgaria, the closest formal equivalent of *draft registration* is *entry on the military roster*: the first administrative step in the subsequent procedures leading to possible conscription.

[117] Rostker v. Goldberg, 453 U.S. 57 (1981), Supreme Court of the United States; National Coalition for Men v. Selective Service System, 969 F.3d 546 (5th Cir. 2020); National Coalition for Men v. Selective Service System, 593 U.S. ___ (2021), denial of certiorari.

cedural deferrals – resembles institutional theatre more than a search for answers. There is constant motion, but no direction. Public attention latches onto the process – which court said what, who will decide next – and gradually drifts away from the only question that actually matters:

On what grounds are we even discussing an obligation of involuntary service enforced by coercion?

Instead, the conversation is reframed into something far more convenient and cynical: whether coercion should remain a "privilege" reserved for men, or be "fairly" extended to women as well. That is the debate itself – reduced to an absurd quarrel over who is to bear the burden of state compulsion, and masked as a question of "equality" in the use of living human beings as an abstract, soulless androids.

Europe demonstrates a similar logic, albeit presented differently. In the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, compulsory service and differential treatment by sex are examined within the framework of the so-called "wide margin of appreciation" granted to states in matters of defence. Applicants speak of discrimination. The Court does not deny that differential treatment exists, but accepts that states have the right to justify it with historical, social, and practical considerations – a broad discretion effectively granted to them by the Court itself.

In other words, the issue is once again shunted onto the dead-end track of "sex discrimination". The discrimination is acknowledged, but not recognised as a problem the Court considers itself obliged to resolve. The question of coercion itself, and the treatment of human beings as a resource, remains a blind spot – visible to all, yet carefully ignored. In this area, the Court of Human Rights behaves less like a court for the protection of human beings and more like other courts confronted with the question of involuntary service: a guardian of state interests wearing the uniform of legal language.

The same line is clearly visible in **Germany**. The Federal Constitutional Court has affirmed that conscription limited to men does not,

in itself, violate the Basic Law.[118] The arguments are carefully selected: historical tradition, the structure of the armed forces, the legislature's right to define the framework. Once again, the question of whether coercion against individual freedom is permissible is not addressed – only whether it may be applied differently to men and women.

Taken together, these decisions form a clear picture. Courts do not answer whether coercion is permissible. They answer how it should be organised so as to appear lawful. Instead of "Does the state have the right to coerce people into involuntary service?", the conversation shifts to "May it coerce people in this particular way – and only this group?"

The situation in Germany is particularly revealing for another reason as well: a selective reading of the constitution. On the one hand, Article 12 sharply restricts forced labour. On the other, Article 12a permits compulsory military and alternative civilian service.[119] This tension should be the real starting point of the dispute. Where does the permissible exception end, and where does the violation of personal freedom begin?

At the very point where one would expect the Court to act responsibly, it shows no real concern for mediating between power and those subject to it. It does not even begin the work of balancing the state's demands on individuals against their inalienable rights. Still less does it reach and impose a reasoned, principled decision.

Bulgaria contributes no distinctive colour to the broader picture. Its so-called supreme law engages in the same gaslighting before our very eyes: ***"Freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and the choice of religion and of religious or atheistic views shall be inviolable."***

Elsewhere, however, it states: ***"Religious and other convictions shall not be grounds for refusal to fulfil obligations established by the Constitution and the laws."***[120]

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[118] Bundesverfassungsgericht, Order of 27 March 2002, 2 BvL 2/02; see also BVerfGE 12, 45, 52–53 and BVerfGE 48, 127, 161, 165.

[119] Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Articles 12 and 12a; Bundesverfassungsgericht, Order of 27 March 2002, 2 BvL 2/02; Bundesverwaltungsgericht, Order of 26 June 2006, BVerwG 6 B 9.06.

[120] Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, Article 37(1); Article 58(2); Article 30(2).

In other words, freedom of conscience and thought is declared "inviolable" – but only until it collides with obligations established by the secular state. Thus the state places itself even above religious conviction, effectively declaring that our thoughts must not stray beyond permitted limits.

That said, some people make the strange claim that I am speaking emotionally or irrationally when I say that the state behaves like a jealous and furious false god. I am simply drawing the necessary conclusion from what the Constitution itself establishes. It declares conscience and belief "inviolable", then places obligations established by the state above religious and other convictions. In practical terms, it does place itself above every god, faith, conscience and worldview that might command a person to refuse state-imposed notions of "duty" and "honour", any form of involuntary service, or any other state-imposed obligation that violates inalienable rights.

Naturally, it also reserves to itself the monopoly on forceful interference with what only appears to be personal inviolability: *"No one shall be detained, inspected, searched, or subjected to any other infringement of his personal inviolability except under the conditions and procedure established by law."* As long as the infringement is legal, the constitutional problem supposedly disappears – according to "our" supreme law.

I have not entered into such a "social contract". My supreme laws are entirely different – they come from a higher authority. One of them, for example, states:

"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men."[121]

Judicial practice does not engage with such "semantic" or "strictly individual" questions at all. It takes for granted the "exception" of compulsory military service from modern forms of slavery and redirects the discussion to something far more convenient: whether this coercion should remain limited to men or be extended to women as well. On such supposedly serious grounds, the debate is reduced to a

[121] 1 Corinthians 7:23.

question of distribution, while the very foundation is left outside any discussion.

One might object that European and international courts have recognised the right to conscientious objection. A central example is Bayatyan v. Armenia (2011), in which the European Court of Human Rights recognised conscientious objection as protected under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. At first glance, this appears to be a protection of individual conscience. In essence, it is something else.

The recognition of conscientious objection does not challenge coercion itself. It creates a narrow exit for a minority the system is willing to tolerate only reluctantly, if at all. Everyone else remains "obliged" to serve – as defined by the state, not by their own conscience. In this way, the exception reinforces the rule: there is an exit, but only for those whose objection the state is prepared to recognise as *serious*, *genuine*, *coherent*, or *procedurally admissible*.[122]

Who determines sincerity, seriousness, and admissibility? The answer is predictable: the very system being challenged. It sets the criteria and decides what kind of conscience can be recognised, usually requiring evidence of a consistent, deeply held, and sufficiently documented position – something many people cannot provide, even if their refusal is genuine.

This is not protection from coercion. It is its careful management.

In my own case, the issue is not merely pacifism. "Pacifism" is the convenient label: it allows refusal to be recast in legal terms as *conscientious objection* and then redirected towards civilian service. My objection

[122] For the European Court of Human Rights' approach, see Bayatyan v. Armenia [GC], no. 23459/03, 7 July 2011; Papavasilakis v. Greece, no. 66899/14, 15 September 2016; Dyagilev v. Russia, no. 49972/16, 10 March 2020. The Court's language refers to convictions that are serious, coherent, deeply and genuinely held, or to procedures assessing whether an applicant qualifies for conscientious-objector status. This confirms that the issue is not treated as a sovereign personal refusal, but as a claim requiring examination and recognition.

is broader. It is a refusal of involuntary service itself, especially when imposed by authorities whose moral and representative legitimacy I do not recognise. My reasons are ethical, moral, philosophical, religious, and political – each valid in itself, yet inseparable from the whole. If the legal framework cannot accommodate this, the problem lies with the framework itself: it must either be broadened or its rulings made more flexible. One person's convictions cannot always be contained within a narrow legal framework and one or two legal terms hardened into complete abstraction.

Of course, they may well believe that the problem does not lie in the limitations of the judicial system. And they expect me to ignore the double standards by which they selectively separate recognised modern forms of slavery from compulsory service to the state under threat of punishment. Or to pretend that their rulings are not repellent when they refuse to take responsibility for deciding questions involving acknowledged discrimination and state violence against people whose only "crime" is belonging to a particular sex and age group, because abstract states are supposedly granted a privilege. Truly, what are such courts for when their system does not even offer the possibility of a winning move? It offers only a judicial Catch-22. There is no need, however, to ask how useful they are to the political "elites".

That is why even court decisions that appear highly critical of the status quo do not touch the foundation. They do not challenge the assault on inalienable rights and freedoms, but only the way coercion is justified and distributed. The dispute is reduced to whether it should apply only to men or also to women; whether there should be an alternative form of compulsory service; what the terms should be; and perhaps even whether some monetary "compensation" might be offered for the "temporary inconvenience". This entire debate is a convenient abstraction, concealing the humiliation of losing bodily integrity, inalienable rights and freedoms under coercion imposed by the state.

The legal notion that monetary **"compensation"** is sufficient in such

cases strikes me as particularly repugnant – not only morally, but because it is completely unable to account for what is actually inflicted. Coercion of this kind does not end when the act ends. It imprints itself. It alters a person's relationship to their own body, to authority, and to the very possibility of trust. It leaves behind not just memory, but residue: anxiety, resentment, a sense of violation that cannot be calculated.

This may not be universal. It does not need to be. It is enough that for some, the trauma of the coercion itself outweighs everything else that is counted as "loss."

This is what the language of "compensation" refuses to see. Personal experience is not required to see this; I have none, having never served involuntarily. It is enough to have some familiarity with the experience of those who served against their will, and enough empathy to understand it.

I am not so naive as to expect empathy from legislators or the executive branch, who, according to specialists more qualified than I am, often display certain traits associated with psychopaths and sociopaths.[123] **But it turns out I was naive enough to expect empathy, in vain, from the judicial system.**

The shame is mine, not theirs. Obviously.

To return to the point: trauma is not a deficit that can be balanced. It is not an absence that money can fill. It is the presence of something that should not have happened and cannot be undone.

To offer money in such a case is not to repair the harm, but to pretend that the harm belongs to the same category as damaged property or lost wages. It does not restore the lost sense of bodily autonomy, personal agency, or control over one's own choices and life. It does not

[123] "What Good Presidents and Psychopaths Have in Common", *The Washington Post*, 18 September 2012; "Would You Vote for a Psychopath?", *Scientific American*, 1 September 2016; "Research Suggests Politicians Are More Likely to Be Psychopaths", *Smithsonian Magazine*, 1 August 2012; "Did a Study Find That Almost All Politicians Are 'Actual Psychopaths'?", Snopes, 21 June 2018.

erase the experience. It does not return the person to the condition they were in before the coercion.

A lawyer I know once told me: "You cannot think that way". He could not answer my question: "Why not? Where is the flaw?" He declined to answer the other question as well: "What kind of jurisdiction conducts policing of thought and imposes prohibitions?" Apparently, that too counted as me being argumentative; his discomfort, supposedly, was my fault.

The discomfort that such arguments provoke is understandable, and expected. But the flaw is not mine. It lies in the thinking of those who confuse what is widely normalised or legally established with what is ethically justified. It is easier for them to rid themselves of that discomfort as quickly as possible than to follow its causes and logic to their conclusion.

With some people, this may be an honest but shallow response: they simply stop thinking when the argument becomes dangerous to their usual cognitive routine. But that is not always the case. There are institutions, governments, courts, and international bodies that can recognise the problem perfectly well when it appears in a politically convenient form. They readily see compulsory service as a form of tyranny when it serves them to cast someone they supposedly oppose as a villain. At the same time, they use the contrast to emphasise their supposed moral superiority.

The example of **Crimea** illustrates this clearly. Since 2015, Russia has conscripted tens of thousands of local men into its armed forces – Russians, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Jews, Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks, and others – regardless of ethnic origin and regardless of whether those men regard the Russian army as their own or as an occupying force. UN bodies, human-rights organisations, and EU institutions have rightly condemned this as unacceptable: under Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, an occupying power has no right to compel the population under its control to serve in its forces. But the deeper problem is not merely occupation. It is the coercion itself.

Morally, the point is just as clear.[124]

Such international objections had absolutely no practical value for the Crimean men already trapped in the machinery, but they show something else instead: when Russia is the culprit, European institutions and governments can see compulsory service for what it is – tyrannical coercion, and therefore an evil when imposed on the unwilling. When European states impose the same structure on people they happen to govern, the language changes. Domination becomes duty. Coercion becomes legality. The use of human beings as military material becomes democratic necessity or national defence.

The principle is no different, nor is the pain of anyone who experiences this coercion as a violation of conscience and bodily autonomy. The only thing that differs is the hand holding the whip: a different master with the same claim to power.

They will justify themselves by claiming that they are "legally" requiring conscription, while the other side is an "occupier". As if the decisive problem were the label attached to the authority, rather than the coercion of human beings into involuntary service. Unless, of course, the hypocrites wish to argue that all young men in Crimea are against military service for Russia, while everyone in the Balkans, Central Europe, or Western Europe is burning with eagerness to join the "united European army", even against their will.

I am by no means convinced that Russian rule over Crimea is any less democratically legitimate in the eyes of the local population than the government of an EU member state such as Bulgaria. Yes, Russian rule in Crimea may be described as occupier rule. But Bulgaria also has a chronic problem with the democratic legitimacy of its own "represen-

[124] See *OHCHR*, "Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation in Crimea", 28 February 2024; *Human Rights Watch*, "Crimea: Conscription Violates International Law", 1 November 2019; European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2024 on the 11th year of the occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol. These sources document Russia's conscription of Crimean residents after the annexation of Crimea and record institutional objections to the practice.

tatives". Voter turnout regularly remains below half of those eligible to vote. The officially reported turnout in the most recent parliamentary elections in Crimea was also below 50 per cent.[125]

This is where the double standard becomes obvious. In one case, the authority in question is declared unconditionally occupier rule and therefore illegitimate. In the other, when Bulgaria is concerned, that same kind of democratic deficit does not prevent its authorities from being supported by international institutions and formally retaining the right to impose obligations even on people who have never authorised them to speak or govern in their name. And no one will be outraged if Bulgaria restores compulsory national service in the near future. On the contrary, it will likely be praised for taking part in yet another sectarian sacrificial ritual in which inalienable human rights and human bodies are offered up on the altar of the godless state.

Involuntary service on behalf of an occupying power can undoubtedly provoke resentment, fear, and a sense of humiliation, all entirely natural and understandable reactions in such a situation. What remains curious, however, is the legal logic that treats coercion exercised by an occupier as qualitatively different from coercion of the same nature when exercised by one's own state. Can the latter not also be a source of resentment, fear, and humiliation?

One might even argue that, in some respects, humiliation inflicted by one's "own" can be more severe than that imposed by an openly hostile force. Just as military conscription is often arbitrarily separated from modern forms of slavery through a double standard, a similarly questionable distinction is made between forced conscription imposed by an occupier and forced conscription imposed by one's own state.

For the person subjected to it, the result in both cases is the same:

[125] Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, Official Results of the Elections to the State Council of the Republic of Crimea, 6–8 September 2024, old.izbirkom.ru.

coercion into involuntary service. The question of which of the two is worse may invite different individual answers, and therefore remains open to dispute: yet another inconvenient and uncomfortable dispute that the judicial system appears eager to foreclose through its own formulations before it has even begun.

But let us set aside, for a moment, the toxic hypocrisy and the arrogance of these politicians, bureaucrats, and magistrates. As I discuss in the Afterword, the current system is, for structural reasons, simply incapable of cultivating the freedom of thought and the corresponding legal concepts needed today – concepts that will likely become even more necessary in the future.

And so the central question remains conspicuously absent from legal thought: why is coercion for involuntary service allowed at all?

The Bulgarian judicial system is likely to follow the same model if some form of "national service" is introduced. If disputes arise within the system at all, they will concern details, but they will not challenge the root of the problem – the assault on personal freedom and the degradation of human dignity. At its core, the problem is the treatment of human beings as inanimate objects and as property to be allocated by the state and consumed by the public-private interests gathered around it.

In this sense, the courts are not neutral arbiters standing outside the dispute. They are mechanisms that apply political will already written into law – often selectively and tendentiously – against the people subject to it. Rarely is this clearer than in the double and triple standards applied to involuntary service demanded by states. The courts give those standards legal legitimacy, arrange them, and finally present them as legally respectable. Then they leave the impression that the issue has been examined objectively and conclusively. But the most important ethical questions about inalienable rights and the limits of state dominion never even reach scrutiny. This is not an oversight. It is the model itself.

The false dichotomy works flawlessly: limited coercion or expanded coercion. The option without coercion does not even enter the legal conversation. This is the same logic I reject in Chapter 22: a false choice is not answered by picking "the lesser evil", but by refusing the game itself.

If you play someone else's game, where your opponents unilaterally set the rules, you will always be outplayed. For the judicial system to be relied upon in matters like this, it would have to be institutionally and practically independent of politics – not in the empty rhetoric of "separation of powers", but in reality. Only then could it act as an effective corrective to the legislature, with judges free to make decisions genuinely responsive to individual cases.

Yes, I was somewhat naive in my previous book when I expressed a degree of sympathy for the judiciary and some hope in it as a potentially adequate arbiter. I withdraw those words in this second book on the subject. Salvation for people like me may be individual; it may involve some form of cooperation with others – but it must certainly bypass the current system, unless one is willing to waste time and resources in fruitless litigation.

There is always a hidden portal out of everything. I know this because I have passed through it at pivotal moments in my life, each time gladly offering the necessary sacrifice before the guardian of the threshold. But that saving way out can only be found in the right places. If you allow yourself to be naive only rarely, for the sake of experience and learning, and in most cases rely on your well-tuned moral compass, it will guide you to the right gods: not the mortal, biased, and tyrannical ones, but the eternal ones, the authors of immutable laws that leave little room for arbitrary or capricious interpretation.

Only those who do not seek do not find.

* * *

Chapter 27
A Modern Form of Slavery

I am not the first to place conscription among the modern forms of slavery, nor will I be the last. Similar formulations have been attributed to Murray N. Rothbard and Ayn Rand, among others, although I do not know those authors deeply enough to invoke them as authorities. Nor is that necessary.

No one and no "supreme laws" can tell me what I am allowed to think or feel about this matter, just as I will not impose my own thoughts and feelings on anyone else. What follows is my own view, together with a brief argument for why conscription and other forms of compulsory service, whether military or civilian, belong within the logic of modern slavery. Before any objection is raised, the family resemblance should be stated plainly.

When institutions publish inventories of "modern slavery" or "contemporary forms of slavery", they do not mean only chains and auction blocks. They mean relations of coercion in which a person's labour, movement, body, or obedience is placed at another's disposal under threat. These relations are typically described under headings such as forced labour, bonded labour, human trafficking and exploitation, forced marriage, the worst forms of child labour, domestic servitude, debt bondage, and related categories. The common thread is involuntary service: work, obedience, or submission extracted without genuine consent and backed by sanctions.

The main recognised forms of modern slavery include:

Forced labour – individuals compelled to work under threat or coercion, with no real right to leave.

Human trafficking – the recruitment, transportation, transfer, har-

bouring, or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation through force, deception, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability.

Debt bondage – a person is coerced into repaying a debt that is manipulated, inflated, inherited, or made practically impossible to escape.

Forced marriage – a person is compelled to enter into marriage without their free and full consent.

Child labour in hazardous conditions – children deprived of education, safety, and childhood, and forced to work under harmful conditions.

Domestic servitude – household workers stripped of freedom of movement, identity documents, remuneration, or the practical ability to leave.

The defining elements of slavery or slavery-like practices are:

Absence of consent, or the inability to withdraw it.

Control through coercion – violence, threats, document confiscation, legal penalties, debt traps, or other forms of pressure.

Exploitation – for labour, sexual purposes, military purposes, domestic service, economic gain, social control, or some other benefit to another party.

Why, then, is conscription not on the list, or not on every list?

The reasons why conscription and its civilian "alternative" resemble slavery are obvious: participation is compulsory; refusal is punishable in a number of ways, including imprisonment; and the individual cannot leave of their own volition. It is carried out under threat of state-sanctioned violence; the service is performed for minimal or sub-market compensation; in many cases, personal documents are confiscated; the risks involved include death, permanent disability, psychological damage, and long-term subordination; and the person's time, body, movement, obedience, and risk are placed at another's disposal.

Why, then, is this form of involuntary service typically excluded from definitions of slavery and slavery-like conditions?

A social contract is theoretically assumed: the citizen receives protection and rights in return. But a genuine contract cannot smuggle in

the "temporary" suspension of inalienable personal rights, or the forcible removal of freedom, and still be presented as protection.

International law, including ILO instruments, does not treat forced or compulsory labour as a legitimate social arrangement. It defines it as work or service exacted under the menace of a penalty and not offered voluntarily – a prohibited form of coercion now commonly placed within the wider field of modern slavery, trafficking, and slavery-like exploitation. Yet the same framework explicitly excludes ***"work or service exacted in virtue of compulsory military service laws for work of a purely military character".***[126] Why? Because the state is allowed to reserve for itself the very coercion it condemns when exercised by others.

The qualification matters: the exception is not for every form of "national service". It is for compulsory military service, and only for work of a purely military character. Once the "alternative" becomes civilian, the argument from immediate military necessity weakens. What remains is solely the assertion that the state may impose service because there is no one to stop it.

This coercion is regarded as a legitimate exercise of state sovereignty. Slavery, too, was once legitimised in exactly this way: by placing domination inside a legal category that power had declared acceptable.

The availability of alternative civilian service in many countries is treated as a mitigating factor. Yet it may just as easily be read as evidence that the purpose is not military necessity at all, but involuntary service for its own sake. The uniform may change, the barracks may be replaced by an office, hospital, institution, or administrative programme, but the underlying claim remains the same: the person may be assigned, used, and punished for refusal. This is slavery in substance, whatever adjectives are attached to make it look like something else.

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[126] *ILO Convention No. 29*, Forced Labour Convention, Article 2(2).

Compulsory national service, whether military or civilian, involves exploitation, compulsory training and labour, control through coercion, the practical inability to leave, restricted freedom of movement, and minimal or symbolic remuneration. Moreover, the state unilaterally imposes a "duty to society" resembling inherited and otherwise imposed debt bondage.

Thus conscription also contains elements typically associated with **human trafficking**, though it is once again shielded from that legal category by state privilege: recruitment, transfer, reception, coercion, exploitation, and the abuse of vulnerability. The person does not freely choose where the involuntary national service, whether military or civilian, will take place, how they will be sent there, or under whose authority they will be placed. Even if the person is asked about their preferences, their "choice" remains confined within a compulsory procedure with limited options. This has direct analogues with the "choice" that may be offered to victims of recognised forms of modern slavery.

In other words, compulsory national service is not merely adjacent to modern slavery. It combines elements found across several of its recognised forms.

The honest conclusion is this:
The distinction between slavery and involuntary service ultimately comes down to who has the power to write the definitions and to declare certain forms of coercion a "legitimate" exercise of state authority. No intellectually honest definition can convincingly identify a meaningful difference between the two on the decisive question: whether one person, institution, or state may dispose of another human being without that person's consent.

As for alternative civilian service, it finds no justification either in the broad discretion granted to states by international courts in organising their defence, or in the meaning of ILO definitions, which likewise permit involuntary labour only for purely military purposes.

That is precisely why this form of compulsory civilian service cannot even be justified under international law and its military exceptions. It is among the strongest evidence that what we are dealing with is involuntary service that is triply flawed. First, it is an end in itself: punishment for refusing military service, combined with the exploitation of people's bodies, labour, and time. Second, it allows states to wash their hands by claiming they are not authoritatively imposing anything specific against the will of citizens, because they supposedly leave them with a choice. Third, the very existence of alternative service, offered by most states that impose compulsory service, serves as a screen for the double and triple standards surrounding the exceptions that international and domestic law permit when state actions must be presented as something different from what would otherwise be condemned if carried out by anyone else.

By any intellectually honest reading, both military and civilian compulsory service belong to the family of modern forms of slavery, until proven otherwise.

Let us nevertheless examine the usual objections, according to which it is supposedly absurd to claim that involuntary service of a military or civilian nature constitutes slavery or a slavery-like condition.

* * *

The first objection:

"It is legal."

So was slavery.

In Rome, slavery was legal. In the United States, slavery was legal. In many other polities, slavery was not merely tolerated but regulated, taxed, inherited, and judicially protected. Law was not the opposite of slavery. Law was often its registrar, custodian, and whip.

Therefore, legality proves nothing regarding the question of freedom and its absence in involuntary military or civilian service. It proves only that power has succeeded in giving coercion an administrative form.

A chain is still a chain even when it is entered into a register and stamped with a seal.

* * *

The second objection:

"It is not slavery, because society needs defence."

This is the same structure of argument by which every coercive order has justified itself. Plantations "needed labour". Empires "needed builders". Naval powers "needed galley rowers". Armies "needed bodies". But the claimed need for bodies has always served more than practical necessity. It also trains obedience, normalises submission, and teaches populations that their bodies are available to power. None of this removes the moral question, nor does it prove that compulsory military or civilian service is not slavery or a slavery-like condition.

The need of a system for other people's labour has never been proof of moral right. It has only ever been the motive of the master.

Need is descriptive. It tells us what a system wants. It does not tell us whether what the system wants is morally permissible, or whether it constitutes slavery or a slavery-like condition.

A state may need soldiers. It does not follow that it is entitled to force unwilling persons into military service. A bureaucracy may need personnel for civilian national service. It does not follow that refusal loses moral force. Between "we need" and "you must" there is a missing premise. That premise is never honestly supplied, because it cannot be supplied without admitting the claim openly: **that some people may dispose of other people's lives, bodies, labour, and obedience.**

Whatever name they give it to make it sound more respectable, its substance remains slavery.

Much more could be said, but one point is decisive for this particular objection. Historically, conscripts have not been used only for defence. They have also been used for offensive wars, invasions, imperial projects, border revisions, ideological crusades, and dynastic or geopolitical ambitions dressed up as necessity. The dead of the world wars and many other conflicts are counted in millions in no small part because states

have been able to turn unwilling populations into expendable military material.

"Defense" is the word placed as a sign above the entrance. But it does not always correspond to what is actually happening inside.

Someone may argue that society needs not only defence, but also a higher birth rate in the midst of an acute demographic crisis. If we follow the logic of the opposing argument, then if there is a shortage of women willing to bear children voluntarily, they too should be coerced. What would prevent a government that reasons in this way from declaring that society needs not only bodies for the army, but bodies for reproduction as well?

Let us carry the logic used to justify conscription fully into this hypothetical scenario: the moment a woman turns eighteen, she must be placed on a reproductive register, undergo extensive medical examinations, and, within a specified period, find a partner by whom she will become pregnant and give birth. Failing that, the equivalent of a draft board would assign her a partner, and the "duty" to provide society with the required number of babies would be carried out through one coercive means or another.

Does this sound abnormal? Yes, it sounds like the idea of a deranged mind. And rightly so, we would immediately hear the objection: **"My body, my choice. This is exploitation on the basis of sex, a form of slavery."**

This is precisely where the hypocrisy becomes visible: they recognise the necessity of personal choice in one case, but refuse to recognise it in the other, when the issue is involuntary service to the state. Some of them even invoke the cliché: "A man who has not served is not a man, just as a woman who has not given birth is not a woman." The problem is that the two are not comparable: no one uses state violence to force women to give birth in service to society, at a particular age and in a precisely prescribed manner. Coercion into compulsory service for men (and in some places for women as well) is not regarded as the mental refuse of a sick mind – because reasons.

When a question is not examined through the principle that we should not demand of others what we would not accept for ourselves,

intellectual monsters are born. And such monsters can go beyond justifying modern forms of slavery. They can justify, even in polished legal language, the deprivation of the most fundamental right of all: the right to life.

They can, and in some places they already do.

* * *

The third objection:

"It is not slavery, because it is temporary."

This fails historically and conceptually.

Historically, slavery has never been uniform. Not all forms were lifelong in every period and place.[127] Systems existed with debt bondage, fixed terms, pathways to manumission, redemption, conditional release, and forms of contractual compulsion. Roman law recognised peculium: limited property under the master's authority which could, in some circumstances, be used towards manumission.[128] In colonial systems, indentured servants often served fixed terms of four to seven years in exchange for passage and subsistence. None of this transformed coercion into freedom merely because a calendar was attached.

A fixed term does not negate slavery or a slavery-like status. It only schedules the coercion.

Someone compelled for six months is not free in that domain for six months. Someone compelled for two years is not free in that domain for two years. The shorter period makes the enslavement shorter; it does not make it something else.

The same excuse could be used to normalise other modern forms of slavery. A person held in sexual exploitation may not be exploited for life, but only for as long as someone profits from their body. Children

[127] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Slavery: Laws of Manumission".

[128] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Peculium".

forced into labour or military use will not remain children forever.[129] Domestic servitude may last years rather than a lifetime. None of this changes the nature of the coercion. Temporary enslavement is still enslavement while it lasts.

* * *

The fourth objection:

"The slave may be bought and sold. That does not apply to a person serving the state."

This is an attempt to hide the essence behind one historical technique.

Yes, chattel markets are one historical form of slavery. But the decisive question is broader and more fundamental: can an external authority dispose of a person's time, labour, body, movement, obedience, and risk without that person's consent?

Under involuntary service, the answer is yes.

A draft board or civilian placement authority classifies the person. The state assigns where the person goes. The command or supervisory structure determines what the person does. The law sets the reporting dates, controls the ability to leave, and threatens punishment for refusal.

This is not merely administration. It is the authoritative disposal of a person.

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[129] "COVID Fuelling Risk of Recruitment and Use of Children in Conflict, UN and EU Warn on International Day", *UN News*, 12 February 2021. The statement is striking because it describes children forced into conflict as the "expendable fuel of war". The principle is the same in adult conscription: a human being is taken, classified, and made available for war against their will. An adult man may have more legal, practical, or unlawful ways to resist or escape the coercion than a child does, but that does not change the nature of the claim being made over him. In one context, such coercion is condemned as turning human beings into expendable material; in another, it is rebranded as duty, preparedness, or resilience. The double standard is revealing.

I would go further: it is not even universally true that the procedure "does not resemble an auction block". Before the Second World War, medical boards at military call-up and mobilisation often worked like a public inventory of bodies. The recruit or mobilised man was required to stand naked while he was examined, measured, and judged in front of military and civilian officials who, in practice, decided his fate.

The scene is a near-complete functional analogue of a slave market. The difference is even cruder: there is no haggling over the exposed body, no private buyer naming a price. The "price" is socialised. The whole of society pays, in money and in moral cost, for the dehumanisation of its own members, put on raw display for classification and for the allocation of how their labour will be exploited. The similarities to slave markets cannot honestly be denied; if someone does deny them, it is simply a conscious refusal to see the obvious.

In most countries today, the procedure no longer looks exactly like that. In parts of the world, however, the change is more superficial. This is the celebrated evolution of the process: the recruit may no longer be required to undress fully from the outset. He may spend most of the process in underwear, or be required to undress only for particular examinations. **Yet the ritual remains:** at some stage the body still has to be exposed, inspected, measured, and certified as usable or unusable human material.

None of this alters the underlying relation.

What is at issue here is a modern form of slavery. A modern form need not reproduce every surface detail of an older one. It need only reproduce the same power to dispose of persons.

By that criterion, the similarity identified between slave markets and conscription procedures is more than sufficient; in some respects, it comes close to a full functional analogue.

Sexually exploited captives and child soldiers are not usually bought and sold in traditional slave markets either, yet this does not prevent their enslavement from being recognised. In the case of involuntary service to the state or army, we are dealing not with a real conceptual

distinction, but with selective distortion, convenient omission, and a blatant double standard.

* * *

The fifth objection:

"A slave has no rights. A person subjected to involuntary service to the state has rights, albeit limited ones."

Again, historically false and conceptually weak.

Historically, enslaved persons in different systems sometimes had limited capacities: restricted property, limited legal capacities, routes to manumission, customary protections. These fragments never abolished subordination. They coexisted with it.

Conceptually, rights under compulsory service, military or civilian, extend only to the boundary of refusal. Beyond that boundary lies sanction.

A person who may speak, sign papers, and file forms, yet may not refuse compelled service without punishment, is not free in that relation. The decisive freedom is missing. And where the decisive freedom is missing, subordinate status remains, however richly decorated by procedural language.

Child soldiers and sexually enslaved women may likewise retain certain minimal "rights": to eat, to bathe, to sleep, to continue existing, even to pray or to amuse themselves within the confines of their serfdom. The same applies to conscripts and to other involuntary servants of the state.

The presence of fragments of legal protection or bare survival does not answer the question. The question is whether the person may refuse the imposed relation without punishment. If not, the decisive right is absent. Where that right is absent, what remains is not limited freedom. It is structured, coercive subordination: a slave-like condition.

* * *

The sixth objection**:**

“The state does not own the person.”

Every tyrannical system perfects its vocabulary in order to present itself in the desired image. Ownership is **denied in words while exercised** in practice.

The operative test is not semantic. It is practical.

Can the system summon by force?
Can it assign by force?
Can it order you to perform physical or intellectual labour under threat of punishment?
Can it punish refusal?
Can it require bodily risk?

If yes, then arguments over terminology become secondary. The governing relation is already present: dominion on one side, slavery on the other.

There is something else that makes this even clearer: can the state punish a person for damaging their own body, once it has already claimed the right to use it for service? In involuntary service, the human body is treated as a resource that the state may dispose of against the person’s own will. The administration determines whether you are fit or unfit; failure to appear for procedures and service is punishable; and if you damage your own body yourself, including through alleged deliberate self-mutilation, so that you cannot be used, this in itself is treated as a crime and may be punished.

The logic is grotesque, yet perfectly clear: the presumed “owner” of his own body is punished for having damaged something that the state already regards as property it may, and intends to, use.

If this is not a modern form of slavery – involving the state's codified claim to the literal ownership of a human being – then what is?

* * *

The seventh objection:

> **"This is a civic status."**

So what?

Slavery, too, was a status. **Status is not freedom. Status is often the legal form through which unfreedom is described**, registered, and enforced.

Placing a person in some civic category does not in itself confer dignity upon them, nor does it automatically bring them freedom. It may simply identify the population over which claims are made. If that category allows the state to compel service, command obedience, restrict movement, and punish refusal, then citizenship, in that respect, has become the modern administrative form of slavery.

* * *

The eighth objection:

> **"There are limits on power."**

There were limits in many slave systems too: customs, procedures, religious constraints, routes to release, judicial forms. A limited master is still a master. Regulated coercion is still coercion.

The relevant question is not whether power has a rulebook. The relevant question is whether the person has a real right to refuse compulsory service. If refusal triggers punishment, the answer is no. The relation is not freedom under regulation. It is slavery under refined procedure.

There are limits on power in other modern forms of slavery too. If someone claims otherwise, let them prove that sexually enslaved women or child soldiers are subject to unlimited power. They cannot. The fact that power is not infinite does not mean it is not en-

slaving. It only means that domination has procedures, habits, boundaries, and preferred methods.

* * *

The ninth objection:

"You cannot be a slave in your own country."

This is sentiment dressed as argument.

Historically, the claim does not survive scrutiny. Roman slavery included people born inside the empire. Serfdom bound peasants to land and lord within their own country or realm. Imperial systems extracted forced labour and soldiers from populations they already ruled. There is nothing contradictory about being dominated, exploited, or enslaved by an authority that claims you as one of its own. History is full of such examples.

Today, not everyone feels or thinks the same way about "their" state. Some identify with it; some do not; some see it as a practical nuisance; some despise it more than any foreign enemy. None of this changes the structure of power. A person can be fully enslaved or placed in an unbearable position of subjugation by a power that claims to represent his nation and his ideals.

In practice, almost everyone today is subject, to some degree, to state power: taxation, surveillance, registers, emergency powers, selective enforcement. None of this makes me sentimental about "democracy", whether substantive or merely formal.

But involuntary service, military or civilian, is of a different order. It is not merely another administrative burden or another civic obligation. It is an assault on a person's inalienable rights and freedoms: on bodily autonomy, convictions, time, conscience, labour, freedom of speech, and forced exposure to risk.

That such a thing can be imposed on an innocent human being

through a formal democratic process does not make it civilised. It only shows that democratic procedure can serve as a ceremonial mask for primitive barbarism, mainly in the East, and savage decadence, typically in the West. Only one political form makes the relation more naked: open totalitarian or military dictatorship.

* * *

The tenth objection:

"If not everyone calls it slavery, it cannot be slavery."

This is the weakest of all. It cannot be defended psychologically, historically, or even logically.

Psychologically, there have always been people who adapted to bondage and even preferred certain kinds of dependency – predictable meals, a roof, an assigned place – because the alternative they could imagine seemed worse. That was true of many ancient slaves; it is true of modern subjects who praise almost any external order above personal autonomy.

Historically, comfort within hierarchy does not dissolve hierarchy.

In an Arabic papyrus letter, a group of prisoners state that they are strongly inclined to offer themselves as slaves in order to escape harsher conditions.[130] This is a direct case in which people preferred slave status to their present condition: imprisonment, social ruin, or both.

In colonial societies, too, there are documented cases in which people, including formally free persons, accepted or sought forms of practical unfreedom – long-term service, self-sale, or practices resembling pawnship – in order to survive. This was not necessarily ideological acceptance. It could be a rational choice under pressure.[131]

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[130] Jelle Bruning, "Voluntary enslavement in an Abbasid-era papyrus letter", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Cambridge Core.

[131] Orlando Patterson, "Slavery and Social Death"; Claude Meillassoux, "The Anthropology of Slavery", especially the sections on self-sale and famine contexts.

Priscus of Panium describes a conversation with a Greek man who had fallen among the Huns after war. According to the account, he had been spared after capture and later remained among them. He claimed that his life there was more tolerable and more just than life in the Eastern Roman Empire: there was less arbitrary interference by officials, simpler rules, and less fiscal pressure. This is a classic example of a person in a subordinate position who did not present his status as an unqualified burden, but as comparatively better than the alternative.[132]

There are also cases in which a slave may even come to prefer his condition if it is privileged. In American cultural usage, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* later gave rise to "Uncle Tom" as shorthand for a recognisable human type: the person under domination who learns to profit from proximity to power. In fiction and in life, the house servant's chains can be gilded.

Quentin Tarantino's Django Unchained gives a vicious portrait of Stephen, the estate's senior house slave, who identifies with the master's house more than with those in the field. His fully real analogues can be seen frequently, even daily, in contemporary life as well, but here we will spare ourselves the naming of specific public figures.

Privilege within slavery does not abolish slavery for everyone else. Logically, acceptance by some does not transform the condition for all. There are people for whom any involuntary military or civil service is a state of unbearable torment. This is evident from the annual cases in which conscripts in various countries commit suicide during their service or shortly thereafter.

In **Russia**, this problem is particularly well documented in connection with *dedovshchina*. For decades, *Human Rights Watch* has described the systematic abuse of new recruits in the Russian armed forces as a practice that leads to the deaths of conscripts every year. One section of the report states that, in certain periods, hundreds of young men take

[132] Priscus of Panium, fragments on the embassy to Attila, 449 CE, preserved in Excerpta de Legationibus; see Roger C. Blockley, The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire.

their own lives annually in despair over such conditions, while many more attempt to do so.[133]

This problem in Russia, however, does not belong only to the distant past or to *dedovshchina*. In 2023, the case of 20-year-old Sergei Gridin from Komi attracted public attention. The conscript took his own life at a military base near Moscow after refusing to be sent to war. According to the reports, his relatives confirmed the case, and the message he left behind reveals precisely the horror of turning an involuntary human being into military material.[134]

The case of Ramil Shamsutdinov, who in 2019 shot eight fellow servicemen in Zabaykalsky Krai, is also revealing. According to statements attributed to him and published by *Baza*, he explained his actions as the result of threats of extreme humiliation and dehumanisation in the barracks: "All the young soldiers before me had already been raped. I knew it. That night it was my turn. There was nowhere to hide. What was I supposed to do?"

The Russian Ministry of Defence denied these claims in the spirit of the old Soviet farce that "there is no sex in the USSR". But the case itself remains one of the darkest testimonies to the kind of environment in which conscription can turn a person simultaneously into a victim driven into a dead end and into a killer, all in peacetime and in his own country.[135]

Finland, often presented as a model of patriotic and well-organised conscription, is no exception. *Yle* reported that the Finnish armed forces began systematically tracking suicides among conscripts, noting a

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[133] "The Wrongs of Passage: Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of New Recruits in the Russian Armed Forces", *Human Rights Watch*, 19 October 2004.

[134] "'To die without blood on my hands': 20-year-old conscript from Komi Republic commits suicide after refusing to go to war", Meduza, 15 February 2023; "Young man on mandatory service kills himself in Russia's Komi: 'I decided to die in my own land without foreign blood on my hands'", Novaya Gazeta Europe, 15 February 2023.

[135] "'They Warned They'll Rape Me': Russian Soldier Stands by Mass Shooting", *The Moscow Times*, 6 November 2019; "Internet hazing breakdown games", *Meduza*, 7 November 2019.

recurring pattern of such cases over the years.[136]

After **Lithuania** restored conscription in 2015, *LRT* reported a series of tragic incidents. The death of a 20-year-old conscript in 2021 was treated as suicide, while subsequent reporting pointed to five suicides among conscripts within a relatively short period following the restoration of compulsory national service.[137]

Documented cases also exist in **Austria**. *ORF* reported on a 22-year-old conscript who took his own life while serving in the Bundesheer. Other archived reports indicate that, within just a few years prior to that, and in the Salzburg region alone, ten young men took their own lives during involuntary service.[138]

In **Greece**, where conscription remains a reality, *eKathimerini* has written of a "worrying number" of suicides among servicemen. Specific cases involving conscripts who took their own lives during active service are mentioned.[139] The article also examines the issue in the context of volunteer soldiers, and the situation does not appear substantially different from the epidemic of suicides among military personnel in the United States; for years, that crisis has also extended to militarised police forces.

After the conscription system was restarted in **Sweden**, similar tragedies appeared in its much-praised model as well. Public attention was drawn to the case of a young woman, Alma Sigvardson, who killed herself months after the beginning of compulsory service.[140] Local criticism raised questions about inadequate responses and the lack of institutional accountability.[141] The conscription system itself, of course, was not called into question – that already falls into the category of "you cannot think that way".

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[136] "Army starts keeping statistics on conscript suicides", *Yle News*, 2 May 2012.

[137] "Death of conscript in Lithuania treated as suicide: military", LRT, 5 October 2021.

[138] "Todesfall bei Bundesheereinsatz", *ORF Vorarlberg*, 15 January 2020; "Acht Unfall-Tote in sechs Jahren bei Übungen", *ORF Salzburg*, 11 January 2013.

[139] "Soldier suicides reach worrying numbers", *eKathimerini*, 19 September 2011.

[140] "Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2024/25", *European Bureau for Conscientious Objection*, **2025.**

[141] "Varningssignaler togs inte på allvar – värnpliktiga Alma tog sitt liv", *Sveriges Radio*, 16 January 2025.

After Sigvardson's death in 2023, there is not enough reliably confirmed information about new suicides or suicide attempts among Swedish conscripts to cite without qualification. But this does not mean that the case was isolated, nor that there is no problem if the number is "only one".[142] On the contrary: in 2025, Pliktrådet, the council of Swedish conscripts, pointed to her death as an example of where a system can lead when young people subjected to involuntary service do not receive timely and adequate care.[143]

A similar picture appears in the broader data on physical injuries under conditions of compulsory service. The Swedish Armed Forces report interruptions of training due to temporarily or permanently reduced physical or psychological capacity.[144] Professional military publications report a sharp rise in workplace injuries, with conscripts as the most affected group.[145] In the first two months of 2026 alone, 134 cases of cold injuries were reported in the armed forces, compared with 47 in the whole of the previous year; almost all those affected were conscripts and students at military schools.[146]

Other cases from Sweden's supposedly exemplary model show the systematic minimisation and neglect of physical injuries: conscripts report that they were not allowed timely access to medical care, that their symptoms were ignored, and that some were simply advised to "grit their teeth" despite the pain. In one case, this later led to emergency surgery and a risk of sepsis.[147]

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[142] "Försäkringskassans bedömning: Alma blev sjuk av lumpen", *Sveriges Radio*, 17 January 2025.

[143] "Rapport kritiserar Försvarets vårdsystem – efter Almas självmord", *Sveriges Radio*, 23 June 2025.

[144] Försvarsmaktens årsredovisning 2024. Bilaga 1, 2 och 5, Försvarsmakten, 21 February 2025.

[145] Linda Sundgren, "Stor ökning av arbetsskador i Försvarsmakten", *Officerstidningen*, 26 June 2025.

[146] "Stor ökning av köldskador – Försvarsmakten startar utredning", *Sveriges Radio*, 26 March 2026.

[147] "Kritiken: Värnpliktiga nekas vård – Johan skulle 'bita ihop'", Sveriges Radio, 24 June 2025.

That is why the criticism must address not only one tragic suicide, but the self-reproducing institutional mechanism through which the armed forces miss, deliberately neglect or arbitrarily deny access to help during physical and psychological breakdowns. By this criterion, the Swedish and Russian conscription systems differ only in the quantitative, not in the qualitative, manifestations of the basic and inevitable problems arising from the exploitation of human beings as a state resource against their will.

It is not the same thing whether risks are accepted voluntarily or imposed through coercion and the threat of punishment.

When the state obliges a person to take part in an activity that carries a foreseeable risk of psychological breakdown, lasting injuries, the need for surgery, and sometimes death, it cannot later hide behind the word "incident" or behind the suggestion that these numbers are acceptable losses and cannot be used against the very existence of a conscription system. In moral terms, physical injuries under conditions of coercion point to criminal negligence, not to an "incident". When psychological breakdown under such conditions ends in suicide, the issue becomes even darker and comes dangerously close to negligent homicide.

This is not the work of an individual villain who can be caught and punished, but of an institutional machine confident in its own impunity: it first calls a person "obliged", then exposes them to danger, and finally reduces the victims to faceless numbers in a grim news item. Note: in peacetime. The statistics themselves often remain without any real discussion, because they are treated simply as appendices to abstract reports about one of the country's many ongoing administrative problems.

Apparently, more innocent blood will have to be spilled in the name of the state Moloch before people realise that only human beings learn from mistakes; states and the political "elites" do not. If that were not so, they would never consider imposing compulsory national service, let alone measure, compare, and exchange its "best practices".

The cases selected here are merely widely known examples. They are not exhaustive, nor do they descend into the deeper darkness of the problem.[148] A single one of them is enough to refute the claim that involuntary service is experienced as a harmless or universally acceptable "civic duty".

For states that create the conditions for such tragedies, no problem exists that deserves more than three days of attention, let alone a serious rethinking of the very concept of compulsory national service. Call me cynical, but so far not a single state that maintains such a system has given me reason to believe that it regards human beings as anything other than, figuratively speaking, potatoes in a sack. What matters for the sake of "collective defence" is that, in transport from point A to point B, most of the potatoes remain fit for consumption. Those that fail and rot, to hell with them. From headcount for the army to entries in a death statistic. Who cares?

The state does not lose sons, daughters, grandchildren, colleagues, neighbours, or friends. It loses mere abstract units; at times, they seem even easier to write off than the inconvenience of certain officials having to simulate humanity during the usual crisis PR exercise after such "exceptionally rare" tragedies. If they are rare, then everything is fine: please, the next news report, or better yet, let us simply switch off our reason and conscience with an entertainment programme.

Only one step separates that "utilitarian" way of thinking, that refusal of moral judgement, from the notorious "Kill them all; God will know His own".[149]

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[148] See, for example, Apter et al., "Death Without Warning? A Clinical Postmortem Study of Suicide in 43 Israeli Adolescent Males", *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 1993. The study covers 43 consecutive suicides among Israeli conscripts aged 18–21: upon enlistment, they were above average in physical and psychiatric fitness, while their depressive states were "recent and reactive", emerging during compulsory military service.

[149] Caesarius of Heisterbach, Dialogus miraculorum, c. 1220–1235, dist. V, cap. 21. At the sack of Béziers (1209), the Cistercian abbot Arnaud Amalric, papal legate of the Albigensian Crusade, dismissed concerns that Catholics would perish alongside Cathars and ordered the massacre of the entire population: "Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius" ("Kill them all; God will know his own").

You are free to think I am dramatising. I will only concede that perhaps one step will not be enough, and that at least two may be needed before we truly get there. But I am convinced that this is where the current direction leads.

There are people for whom conscription slavery is unbearable torment. And there are people like me who would accept any consequence but will not climb into the sack of potatoes destined to feed the authoritarian machine.

As for the objection that "if not everyone sees it as slavery, then it is not slavery", it is enough to apply the same logic to other situations: if a child is indoctrinated into militarism to the point of fanaticism, or if a sexually enslaved woman develops a trauma bond with her exploiters, that does not alter the nature of the relationship itself. Such relationships remain officially recognised modern forms of slavery.

Compulsory national service fits the same pattern. It is sustained not only through militarisation mediated by the media and the education system, but in many cases by something deeper: the willingness of many people to adapt to their unenviable condition, often expending more energy doing so than they would invest in defending their own boundaries.

* * *

No politician, no judge, no media spokesperson, no parent, no neighbour, no colleague, no friend – no one – has the right to tell you how you ought to feel about compulsory service that violates your will. They may dress coercion in whatever words they choose: justifications, personal opinions, excuses, legal terminology, even partial and usually minimised acknowledgements of the evil that lies at the root of every act of violence against the freedom of the innocent.

They are capable of anything: relying on double standards in the definitions and classifications of slavery; pretending not to notice the gaps in their own logic; applying every comforting rationalisation that

comes to mind; imposing every convenient mental template upon you: *"you cannot think that way", "if you were a patriot, you would not view service in this way", "if you had tried it, you would see that it is not so terrible and even has its benefits".*

You are not obliged to taste something you already recognise by its stench as shit before stating, with complete confidence, that you are not going to like it.

All these techniques have one purpose: to make you doubt your own thoughts, your own judgement, even your most intimate convictions. They may try to drag you into the current of conformism with labels ranging from "coward" and "selfish" to "traitor". I do not believe there is any boundary they would not cross in their efforts to subordinate, control, and exploit you.

But they cannot dictate your inner judgement.

If this feels like slavery to you, if you see the structural parallels with slavery, if you feel yourself dissolving from an individual person into a shapeless collective mass, you have every right to think so. This is slavery in its very essence: modern, imposed, and still justified by states that I could never regard as civilised, regardless of their other cultural, social, or economic achievements.

I will not tell you how you ought to feel, or within what legal frameworks, media dilemmas, or political ideologies you are "permitted" to think. Others are already doing that diligently enough to all of us.

This book has one modest purpose. If you have discovered, perhaps unexpectedly, that you think and feel as I do, or if you already shared the same or a similar view of involuntary service, you should know that you are not alone at all. More than that: whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever your place in society may be, there is always a way out of slavery. That is true if it has already begun. It remains true if they are only now preparing to lay hands on your freedom.

I know this from experience, and I say it plainly because it leads to the deepest secret of liberation: **no one can serve two masters**.

In the deepest sense, service itself is indeed unavoidable. But it is not the same whether it is voluntary or coerced. And it is not the same thing who benefits from it.

So, having rejected the false dilemmas of the previous chapters, I end with the only real one: the choice between masters.

Will you remain slaves to men?

Or will you seek the One who says: *"Take my slavery upon you and learn from me... for my slavery is good, and my burden is light"*?

* * *

Afterword
"What Do You Propose?"

This is a question I hear often. With varying weight. Sometimes it is loaded as a provocation – an implicit claim that there is no alternative, and that my refusal of the existing system is mere childishness. Sometimes it comes as genuine curiosity, from someone who has seen for themselves that something at the foundation is flawed, and is searching for direction.

This afterword is for the second kind of reader: the one who is no longer asking whether the structure is sound, but what might stand beyond it. It is for those who do not ask in order to convict me of saying nothing, but because they have already arrived at the working conclusion that the present order – with its "separation of powers", its "democratic processes", and its institutional theatre – does not answer the questions that matter.

For as long as I have been writing against involuntary service – one of the most extreme expressions of the madness and corruption of the unitary state – I have also been writing about the alternative. It has a name: the threefold social order, also known as the threefold social organism. For short: the TSO.

Curiously, when I write against something familiar like "national service", there is pushback, dispute, obstruction, smokescreens. When I write in favour of something new and constructive, silence follows. Even among my own readers, the TSO remains a niche topic, although it has been central to certain periods of my work and I have repeatedly insisted on its importance.

Except among my closest allies in conviction, my insistence provokes the same sequence of reactions:

"But how can it work without a centralised state?"

"All right, we already have a state. Why should it not control education?"

"Where has what you are proposing ever been applied in practice?"

And dozens of questions like these, before the cycle closes – the same questions, the same answers, the same resistances. It becomes clear to me that the people I speak with are not really asking; they are defending. Defending the conviction that the present system is the only one possible – that all that is needed is to put "the right people" in "the right places". Through that defence, they read my firmness as an accusation: that I consider them intellectually lazy. Partly, they are right. I do not necessarily consider them lazy, but I do consider them captive to ideas they do not bother to examine with any depth.

It seems to me that the only people beyond reach are those who live under the mind-bending delusion that it will be enough to fix the economy, after which everything in education, culture, legislation, the judicial system, and even the military will somehow flow smoothly of its own accord. There is nothing I can do for them. I work for the rest.

I have written about the TSO on blogs, translated key texts, published those translations, and spoken about the idea. And then I gave up – not on the TSO, but on the stubborn effort of speaking to walls and through closed doors.

This afterword is last in order, but not in importance. It is for those who ask in genuine honesty: "What do you propose?"

The diagnosis is simple, though painful. Modern society is organised around the unitary state: a centralised state that seeks to encompass everything. The economy is a matter of the state, or of state regulation. Education is a matter of the state. Culture, science, the media – they depend almost entirely on a state, quasi-state, or corporate framework. And the corporations, in their turn, are fused with the state so closely that in many places it is impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins.

It is precisely within this structural entanglement – of everything in one – that the gravest abuses are born. Compulsory national service is among them. Because when the state holds legal-political, economic,

and spiritual-cultural power at once, it can do almost anything: it can decide who studies what, who works where, who lives how, and who works and dies for "the cause", and when.

The TSO is neither a party, nor a movement, nor a utopia. It offers both a diagnosis of the present social organism and a prescription for life-saving surgery. The operation: dividing the social body into its three natural domains.

The three spheres consumed by the unitary state are:

The spiritual-cultural sphere. This is the place of education, science, art, religion, personal initiative, individual gifts. It is everything that comes from the human being and is expressed outward into the world.

The legal-political sphere. This is the place of laws, rights, democratic decision-making, and equal relations among people. It is everything that concerns people equally – as human beings, regardless of their talents, wealth, or profession. It also concerns the relationships among individual human beings when they cannot regulate themselves and seek mediation.

The economic sphere. Here belong production, exchange, consumption, and professional associations. It is everything that meets material needs – both individual and collective.

The three domains exist now as well – but entangled, or subordinated to one another in ways unfavourable to each. The idea of the TSO is not their abolition, but their liberation from one another. Each must operate by its own principle, within its own limits, with its own means.

This, therefore, is not "three powers" in the Montesquieu sense – the threefold order is not a political mechanism for the mutual control of branches of the same central machine. It is a structural principle for the whole of society. The different domains of human life have different natures; every attempt to govern them by the same method damages them.

Each domain works by its own motive. And here comes something that, for two centuries, has been called "self-contradictory" in its very formulation – the slogan of the French Revolution:

Liberty. Equality. Fraternity.

The reason for the contradiction is not in the slogan. It is in the fact that no one considered that the three principles belong to different domains – and that only when they are properly distributed do they acquire their meaning. This slogan, which almost every person in modern civilisation at least outwardly endorses – often not as a conscious political position, but as an inner democratic instinct – was misplaced and misapplied in the very upheaval that produced it.

The French Revolution gave one of the decisive forms to the modern unitary state. It also introduced mass national service in a coercive form, new not only in degree but in kind: universal in a way that even the military obligations imposed by the Roman Empire had never been. The centralised unitary state and its compulsory national service are not a civilisational step forward. In some respects, they are a step backward; in others, a step sideways, bypassing more reasonable, more ethical, and more sustainable solutions.

Adopted across the world and normalised over more than two centuries, the unitary state and its compulsory national service have been presented as "the only possible solutions". They are not – neither at the national level nor at the international one. And it is precisely the threefold order that points towards what better solutions might look like.

The principle of **Liberty** belongs to the spiritual-cultural sphere. Why? Because spiritual life is the expression of individual human essence. People think, feel, create, believe – all of this comes from personal freedom. No one can be ordered to be talented, to believe in something, to create something original. You can compel someone outwardly to comply, but inwardly they will hate what is imposed and sabotage it. This is why education – the place where the human being is formed – must never become a state instrument, regulated by bureaucrats and used to process children into resources, expendable material, or abstract bodies for future service. Nor should education become a corporate commodity. It must belong to the creators of spiritual and cultural values, in free relationship with those who seek them.

Equality belongs to the legal-political sphere. Why? Because in this

domain all people are equal – as bearers of rights, as human beings before the law, as voices in democratic decision-making. Here equality is not a hollow phrase, but a structural condition. My voice weighs as much as yours. My right to personal sovereignty is the same as yours. My dignity is inalienable, as is yours.

But take note: a state that operates on this principle must concern itself only with that in which people are equal. Not with what distinguishes them – talents, gifts, religious belief, ideas (these belong to the sphere of the spirit) – nor with what they exchange – goods, services, and the associations of trade and industry (these belong to the sphere of the economy). The legal-political sphere decides only what is common to all human beings. It may also have narrowly defined regulatory tasks in the economic and spiritual domains, but only on specific matters.

The principle of **Fraternity** belongs to the economic sphere. Why? Because the economy is by nature cooperation – no one meets their needs alone; we all produce for one another. And this interdependence demands a form that is neither ruthless competition nor state distribution – the first needlessly cruel, the second inefficient and corrupt. The proper form is the association: unions of producers and consumers who together determine what is needed, how much, where, and for whom. Fraternity here is not sentimentality. It is the functional recognition that each depends on the other, and that economic activity without this recognition degenerates.

* * *

Now let us see what happens when the three principles are misplaced and misapplied. This is precisely what the centralised state does: it takes a principle from one sphere and imposes it on another.

When you try to impose **equality** on the spiritual-cultural sphere, you get uniform education. All pupils learn the same thing, by the same method, according to the same plan handed down from a ministry. Individual aptitudes and talents are crushed. Originality is uprooted. The ideas that might bring renewal to the other domains, the legal and the

economic, either never reach maturity and realisation, or reach them only in corrupted form. The damage becomes even worse when education and culture are also subordinated to economic interests. This describes precisely the modern educational system – from primary school to university – and equally the difference between genuine culture and the entertainment industry.

When you try to impose **liberty** on the legal-political sphere, you get the "liberty" of the strong to trample the weak. A market democracy in which rights are bought and sold. Legislation whose principal patrons are those with more money. This is the modern political system in most "democratic" countries.

When you try to impose **equality** on the economic sphere, you get socialist centralisation. "Everyone" receives "the same" – but someone must decide what exactly, and that someone becomes master. Shortage, corruption, subordination. This is the Soviet model and its successors.

When you try to impose **fraternity** on the legal-political sphere, you get theocracy or an ideological state. The "brothers" decide who deserves to belong to their community; the rest are enemies by definition.

Only when the principles stand in their proper places – liberty in the spirit, equality in rights, fraternity in the economy – does each act in a healthy way.

What does this mean in practice?

The state, that is, the legal-political sphere, is confined to its own domain. **It does not govern the economy**, except in narrowly defined functions – the framework of labour law, the protection of basic natural resources, the prevention of economic servitude, the regulation of monopoly abuses. **It does not govern spiritual life:** schools, universities, media, and churches are free of it. It does not concern itself with expressions of individuality: the unique qualities that make each human being what they are. It concerns itself with rights – with the equal relations among people, with what is common to all human beings, with that in which we are all alike.

The economy organises itself, through associations of produc-

ers and consumers. It works on the principle of real needs, not artificially manufactured growth. And – crucially – it loses interest in fusing with the legal-political sphere. Why? Because in the legal sphere there is no business. There are no bills for sale. There are no regulations to be evaded through lobbying. The legal sphere offers no advantages to be bought, because it does not concern itself with managing economic life – as the unitary state does. This is how the most toxic part of the "fusion between corporations and the state" disappears: the so-called public-private partnership that disfigures politics today.

The spiritual-cultural sphere is wholly free. Free from the state – because no minister determines the curriculum or the scientific priorities. Free from the economy – because the quality of education does not depend on whether it produces consumers and employees for a given industry. Schools are communities of teachers, parents, and pupils; universities, of researchers and students.

And it is precisely here that something happens which, within the unitary state, appears impossible: the spiritual sphere prepares people who enter the other two with an unclouded mind. Lawyers and judges raised in a free environment do not think like corporate functionaries. Economists shaped by educational environments independent of the state do not feel obliged to serve narrow political interests. Teachers who depend neither on a ministry nor on a corporation raise free citizens, instead of behaving like bureaucratic drill sergeants while teaching "career orientation".

Each new generation brings new ideas. This is the most unnoticed and yet most important work of the TSO: the restoration of the natural flow of new ideas, from the spiritual essence of the human being through rights and economy.

And here comes something that will surprise many. When each of the three spheres is free within the bounds of its own nature, they do not war against one another. On the contrary – they support, complete, and correct one another.

Why? Because every human being participates in all three. None of us belongs to a single sphere. We learn in the spiritual sphere, work in the economic sphere, take part as equals among equals in the

legal-political sphere. We are parents in the spiritual sphere, citizens in the legal, consumers and producers in the economic. And it is precisely through us that the three spheres are united – not through the state from above, but through the human beings who live in all of them at once.

This is true democracy. Not representative democracy, in which a narrow stratum "represents" the rest and decides on their behalf, but structural democracy: a democracy in which you have a direct voice in the legal sphere, direct action in the economic, and direct freedom in the spiritual.

The three spheres regulate one another, but not by the mechanism of Montesquieu's "three powers", which is internal to the state and therefore can only be formal. They regulate one another by their own differing natures: the economy cannot buy the legal sphere, because that sphere offers nothing for sale. The spiritual sphere cannot become a state ideology, because the state has no instruments by which to govern it. The legal sphere cannot dictate the economy, because it concerns itself only with what is common to all human beings, not with specific market and production decisions.

The check is by construction. Not by procedure.

* * *

What does all this have to do with the central question of this book?

Everything.

The unitary state can impose compulsory service because it holds together powers that should belong to separate domains:

In the spiritual sphere, it determines why one must serve – "duty and honour", patriotism, "the common good", the ideology of the moment.

In the legal sphere, it determines who must serve – an age group, men, and now increasingly women too; registers, lists, and penalties for refusal.

In the economic sphere, it determines how this labour will be "compensated" – whether there is a wage, what costs are covered, who will pay, with whose taxes, and how the employers losing their own staff to

"national service" are themselves to be "compensated."

From this concentration of power comes the arrogance of total authority. The state no longer needs to persuade; it can declare: "You will serve – because it is right (in the spiritual sense), because it is lawful (in the legal sense), and because that is how we will compensate you (economically)." In short, the logic is simple: because we say so – and because we have everything we need to enforce it.

In the threefold social order, such a concentration of power is impossible.

In the spiritual sphere, no one can impose a single ideology of "duty and honour". Education stands on its own, independent of both state and economic power. It is guided by the free activity of educators and by an understanding of the growing human being as a unique combination of physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative capacities and talents. A person's consciousness is shaped by many living and diverse sources, not by ministerial directives or externally imposed agendas.

In the legal sphere, no obligation can be imposed without democratic will – and democratic in the deep sense, not in the sense of "fifty-one per cent of voters" acting through representatives who betray that vote within the first month after the election. Such a democratic will, in which people are raised in freedom and are economically independent, cannot sustain involuntary service.

Defence – if society decides it needs it – is financed through taxes and organised on a voluntary, remunerated basis. Human labour is not a state-owned commodity, nor something the legal sphere can summon at will. It belongs to the person who carries it within them.[150]

Speaking of the voluntary principle: one person may have not only the physical capacity but also the inner disposition for voluntary military service for society. Another may contribute to the same cause by voluntarily improving the necessary uniforms and work clothing. A third may contribute through logistics, private land, or even unpaid

[150] This short overview of the TSO does not allow for full detail – on the nature of taxation under this framework, for instance, and the new logic behind it. Those who are interested will find books in German and English; my collaborators and I have by now translated most of them into Bulgarian as well.

labour – provided they are convinced of the cause, not commanded into it.

In other words: the TSO does not forbid defence. It forbids coercion. And coercion becomes possible precisely when the three spheres are entangled into one.

The TSO does more than diagnose the fundamental problem of the unitary state – a problem humanity has been living with for more than two centuries. It offers a sustainable and rational alternative.

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I lay no claim to authorship.

The idea of the TSO comes from Rudolf Steiner, formulated at the end of the First World War – in that historical moment when the old European order was disintegrating after the death of millions and the maiming of millions more on the battlefields, and the new order had not yet found its form. Steiner was not alone in criticising the society of his time, particularly the party thinking he saw as the suspension of independent thought in favour of political conformity. But he was among the few who proposed something more than yet another political programme.

He offers a structural analysis and a comprehensive vision for a new social order, qualitatively different from the conventional divisions between left and right.

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Some will object: "Fine, but this is utopian. No one has ever put it into practice."

My answer is this: something does not become utopian simply because it has not yet been implemented. Especially when it has not been implemented precisely because people dismiss it in advance as utopian. That is a circular argument, not a real objection.

There are ideas that form part of the broader concept of the TSO and already work – sometimes quietly, unnoticed. Waldorf education, with

more than a thousand schools across the world, is an attempt at a free spiritual sphere. It cannot unfold its full potential, because it is forcibly held under the control of the unitary state. Biodynamic agriculture – for an economy founded on associations. Many cooperative movements, alternative banks, local communities, free media – all of them carry elements of the TSO without carrying the name.

But the full implementation of the TSO has not happened. And it will not happen if we wait for political will from above.

The TSO will be rejected by those who now hold power within the unitary state. It removes the foundation of their power over the human beings on whom they prey. It returns them to their own spheres, where they have no legitimacy to dispose of the bodies, consciences, and lives of others.

Politicians no longer "lead" the economy. Businesspeople no longer buy laws. Professors no longer serve a ministry, nor do ministers hand down the curriculum to professors and teachers. Each remains in their own sphere and bears responsibility within it – to the people who live and contribute in that same sphere, and not to some pyramidal authority, much like a military hierarchy.

This is why the TSO will not come from above. It can come only from below, and only when enough people make the necessary effort to change their thinking. Only the deluded can believe that problems can be solved through the same way of thinking and the same system that created them.

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The question with which I began this afterword was: "What do you propose?" My answer can now be brief.

I propose liberty in the spirit, equality in rights, fraternity in the economy. I propose that we live in a society made of three domains, each set on its own proper and sound foundation, instead of in one painfully entangled mass in which everything is governed by the same apparatus. I propose a society of human beings who participate freely in all three spheres and, in doing so, connect them in a way no central

authority could ever achieve without turning into tyranny. For it is the people themselves – not any institution above them – who connect the separate domains into a genuinely democratic whole.

I am not proposing anarchy. I am not proposing statelessness. I am not proposing a utopia.

I am proposing a natural order of things. One that answers to my impulse for real democracy – not its façade.

Just as the human body is composed of distinct systems that complement one another, so too must the social organism be divided into spheres that operate autonomously while remaining connected to one another. No human body is perfect, invulnerable, or immune to harm from within or without; it is not a utopia, and it can fall ill. The same is true of the threefold social order. Yet a living organism can heal itself, because the illness of one system can be compensated for and corrected by another. The threefold social organism has the same capacity because of the division just described.

The unitary state has no such capacity. In it, everything is fused into a single whole, like a barrel of honey spoiled by a spoonful of tar. That is the point of the old saying: when everything is mixed into one mass, a small corruption spreads through the whole. "We are all in this together" – unless we wisely choose otherwise.

I propose a secular state that remains within its own proper sphere and does not interfere in spiritual or ethical questions such as "duty" and "honour".

And of course, I propose the inviolability of personal freedom in matters of participation in any collective undertaking that would lay claim to the body, conscience, labour, speech, freedom of movement, or exposure to risk of an innocent human being. Not as a gift from the state. But as a starting point, because many rights and freedoms do not derive from the state; they are inalienable and fundamental.

From there – everything else.

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If you have been attentive, you will have understood that I regard involuntary service as a modern form of slavery. It is one of the most visible symptoms of the terminal illness within the unitary state organism – a predatory organism that continues to show signs of life only because it sucks not only resources but the very life forces out of everyone within its reach. A parasite, no less.

This is the problem I have been exposing for so many years now. It is what we are up against. And "national service", in one form or another, is only one of the most visible and most acute spasms of its agony.

Some people who supposedly follow my work regularly, year after year, still have not understood what I am fighting against or where the root of the problem lies. They tell themselves, and their audiences, that I am bothering them with "outdated topics like conscription".

Let us summarise this fundamental problem, from which institutionalised barbaric crimes against humanity such as compulsory "national service" arise, this time in Steiner's words:

> *"The exhaustion of the impulses that once sustained the foundations of the state has also disclosed to us the fact that, in our days, it has become almost customary for many people to regard the existence of the state as an end in itself. They forget that the state exists for the sake of human beings. When someone holds that the state is a final end in itself, this is possible only when he has, to a vast degree, lost the capacity to assert his inner human individuality.*
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> *Such a person then comes to feel himself obliged to care for the essence of the state as a sum of various institutions – institutions that, in reality, do the opposite of their proper tasks. He proceeds to invest in the institutions of the state far more than is needed for the individual human being who constitutes that state to stand their ground. And the more is given to the state, the more strength is lost by the human beings who bear its weight."*[151]

[151] *"Троичният социален ред" [The Threefold Social Order],* three lecture series by Rudolf Steiner, 2019, ISBN 978-954-9670-40-0. For lectures in English, see RSArchive.org.

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I have answered the question with which this Afterword began: "What do you propose?"

The cure has been briefly presented. Not for the first time, not for the second, and certainly not for the last.

If anyone expects to be compelled to read further, to reflect, and to understand what has been written, they have understood nothing of this book. Coercion is to be expected from others. And those coercions – each more vicious than the last – will come again and again.

Either the cure of the threefold social order begins, or the agony of the unitary state will end as it has already ended twice in modern European history. It will not end through the radical reform needed for a true renewal of the social order. Not through dignity. Not through reason. But through a modernised totalitarian nightmare, ruined homelands, and, for the third time, tens of millions of corpses across "united" Europe.

None of this is hard to see if one follows the consequences of the sinister agendas described in this book. And these agendas are hardly the only ones. Things will become much darker before they calm down again – briefly, if the changes remain merely cosmetic, as they have so far.

Before the First World War, and again before the Second, Steiner pointed to the forces that would lead Europe into catastrophe, while politicians continued to assure people that peace would be preserved. He also made clear that a third war – or any later one – would remain possible so long as the same fundamental flaws in thinking and society-building were repeated again and again in the vain hope of better and lasting results. The parallel with our own time is hard to miss. Anyone with a sound grasp of reality can probably already tell where the near future is headed, even without accepting every argument in this book.

If suffering ever teaches wisdom, a Europe devastated yet again may reveal more sharply than ever the failure of the present order, founded on centralised states and unions – and stand as the tragic but perfect

opportunity for building a new and truly sustainable one. Otherwise, the parasites in the shadows will always be ready to offer their own version of "build back better", built upon other people's bodies, other people's lives, and the lifelong involuntary servitude of other people's offspring. Another cycle of decades-long suffering may then have to pass before the next chance emerges for the necessary radical yet life-saving operation on the social organism.

Either way, the choice comes down to one thing: to be a slave to corrupt people or to become the master of your own destiny. Destiny inevitably involves service. The question is whether that service will take the form of "national service" imposed through economic or legal coercion, or service to all humanity, offered in love and in freedom.

Europe is quietly changing its vocabulary, and with it the rules by which we live. Words we thought had been left in the past – compulsory military training, conscription, mobilisation – are returning, wrapped in modern technocratic language. From official European Commission reports to calls by technology corporations such as Palantir for "universal national service", the individual is increasingly seen less as a free bearer of rights and more as an available resource: a body to be allocated, forced labour to be exploited, a conscience to be subordinated.

This book will not deal in conspiracy theories. It traces and analyses new official documents: reports calling for the restoration of compulsory national service in the European Union and for Member States to exchange "best practices" in its implementation; legislative changes that prepare or impose it; court decisions that legitimise it. High-level reports openly call for women to be included in defence obligations as well – including in civilian roles and through the workplace. The involvement of employers and trade unions in the process of redirecting young people towards military structures is also envisaged. All this outlines a broad, large-scale process of militarisation unfolding before our eyes, from the easternmost to the westernmost reaches of the European continent.

The events and documents examined in this book are not merely responses to a looming threat. They outline the architecture of a modernised form of coercion, aimed at subjugating entire societies through military order and command logic – because only in this way can the new authoritarian order be presented as a necessity, and submission as a duty. This book shows where all this is leading, while it can still be prevented or at least mitigated. And it marks out the final boundary that a person must recognise for himself, before the system explains to him that it is already too late.